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Stick with It

Adams finally found mold for success

By Bob Schultz
Eagle Staff Writer

PORTERSVILLE — William Adams, CEO of Adams Manufacturing, now says that when he started looking to create his own business 35 years ago, the result was “a complete fiasco.” But during that first failed attempt, he came up with the inspiration for a new product.

That opportunity has grown from Adams selling his products to one business at a time into Adams Manufacturing.

It employs more than 250 people and has facilities in Portersville and Ellwood City in excess of one million total square feet.

Products are distributed across North America and overseas.

Adams was born in Illinois but ended up in the Pittsburgh area where he was stationed with the Army before going off to Vietnam. He came back to the area following his service and got his master's degree in library and information science.

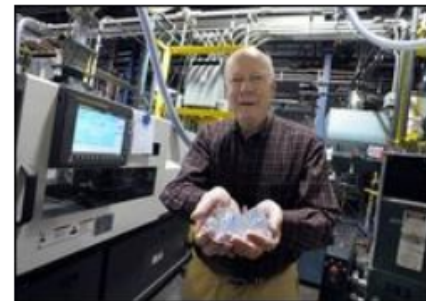
He worked in the Pittsburgh Public Schools for a few years.

“I didn't mesh well with public education,” he said.

His grandfather had died and left him \$10,000. With that money, he quit his librarian job intent on starting his own business.

His first business idea spawned in the early 1980s was to take bubble wrap and put in it home basements, attics and storm windows for insulation.

He had bought a truckload of the product to start the business.



William Adams, CEO of Adams Manufacturing, shows some suction cups at his company's Portersville plant. Though his company now has a global distribution network, Adams started out selling from his car.
JUSTIN GUIDO/BUTLER EAGLE

But when that venture went nowhere, he took what little money he had left and created an injection mold to make suction cups.

Driving by a tire shop, Adams noticed it had 20 signs in a window, all held up by duct tape. After speaking with the owner about the new suction cups that could hold up the signs, the owner told Adams that he would take two boxes.

After that day, Adams focused on selling his suction cups.

"I had so many dollar bills that I couldn't fold my billfold," said Adams, realizing he had stumbled onto a good idea.

He drove around to stores in the Pittsburgh area. Adams began selling to hardware and craft stores, which would buy for resale instead of selling his suction cups door-to-door.

Adams sold to hardware chains such as True Value, Ace and Do-It-Best that could distribute the products across the United States.

Soon, his suction cups were in stores from Columbus, Ohio, to Philadelphia and to Erie.

Several years later, Adams made another injection mold that advanced his suction cups from needing a push pin or tack to having a hook fastener already attached. The company also offered three cup sizes.

Following on the heels of the suction cup success, the company invested in molds for resin furniture and other items that have allowed it to grow.

"We developed the first new Adirondack chair since the Civil War," said Adams. It has been one of his most successful molded furniture products.

The company has 160 to 170 patent patterns for its furniture.

Adams now creates easy-to-use, affordable products from stacking and folding resin furniture to holiday decorating accessories including magnets, suction cups, clear tie-alls, ornament hangers, yard decor, light and wreath holders.

"Our state-of-the-art technology and skilled, dedicated associates have helped us grow exponentially. We're a world-class supplier that still cherishes its small-town values," Adams said. He considers Adams Manufacturing a family business, one that grew out of his first suction cups. Adams started in 1981 in a garage in Portersville.

A 15,000 square-foot facility was built on West Park Road in 1986. That space was expanded to 50,000 square feet.

In 2000, a new facility was built on Route 422 with 124,000 square feet, which Adams said was filled within a few years because of the business' growth.



Adams Manufacturing now makes a line of resin furniture. CEO William Adams says the company was responsible for creating the first new Adirondack style chair since the Civil War. The furniture has been one of the company's most successful products, he added.
JUSTIN GUIDO/BUTLER EAGLE

In 2008, the company committed to making sturdy furniture and bought two former facilities in Ellwood City and rehabilitated them for storage and distribution. Adams said that Ellwood City is the heart of the logistics and shipping for his company. Motorists there often notice the huge stacks of chairs sealed in plastic in the warehouse parking lot. About 30 of the more than 250 people employed by Adams Manufacturing work at the Ellwood City facilities. It also leases a site in New Castle for storage and distribution.

ADAMS FILE

Name: William Adams

Address: Muddy Creek Township

Employment: Chief executive officer of Adams Manufacturing

Family: Married, four children

Personal information: U.S. Army veteran who served in Vietnam; has master's degree in library science and previously was librarian in Pittsburgh Public Schools.

Community service: Former Slippery Rock School Board member for 12 years, including serving as president.

'Our state-of-the-art technology and skilled, dedicated associates have helped us grow exponentially. We're a world-class supplier that still cherishes its small-town values.'

LIFE LESSONS

William Adams, chief executive officer of Adams Manufacturing, offered these suggestions on how Butler County can be improved to help current and foster new businesses:

- "Butler County should be a place as free from bureaucratic oversight as possible."
- "If conscious efforts are made to discourage all the needless regulations, the region would blossom."

ON THE JOB

Name: Adams Manufacturing

Address: 109 W. Park Road, Portersville

Chief executive officer: William Adams

What it makes: Suction cups, holiday decorating accessories, stacking and folding resin furniture

Employees: 250-plus

Phone: 800-237-8287

Website: www.adamsmfg.com

Quote: "First, do no harm," is the foundation of the company's products and practices.

BUSINESS INSIGHT

William Adams, chief executive officer of Adams Manufacturing, offered these two tips to be successful in business:

- The first tip is that "the customer is right."
- The second tip is "always remember rule No. 1."