

Universal Polymer buys Ohio firm Crest Rubber

By Mike McNulty

Rubber & Plastics News Correspondent

MIDDLEFIELD, Ohio—Universal Polymer & Rubber Ltd. has acquired Crest Rubber Co. to bolster its presence in the compression molded rubber product sector.

It purchased all of Crest's business assets except the firm's plant in Ravenna, Ohio, according to Joe Colebank, president and CEO of Middlefield-based UP&R, one of six operating companies that make up the portfolio of the Cypress Companies, an Akron-based private investment firm that bought Universal in 2002.

Crest's work force of seven—one involved in sales administration and the other six in manufacturing—will be retained. They will be transferred to either UP&R's Middlefield or Tallmadge, Ohio, plants, he said, while the business itself will be transitioned into the Middlefield molding operation.

Formed in 1960, Crest has been in continuous operation since then, producing hydraulic and pneumatic seals as well as various other industrial products, including agricultural mats, utility mats and mud flaps.

Saved by UP&R

Crest had gone into receivership in late 2016 after it was fined by the Environmental Protection Agency and its owner, Dave Clark, had died. It couldn't recover, Colebank said.

"I knew this business, and I had a soft spot in my heart for this one," he said. "And I knew it could be a good business again, so we stepped in and bought it. Otherwise, it would have gone under."

Financial details were not disclosed.

Colebank noted that Crest "has solid, long-term employees, a good book of business, good support assets," and the addition will help UP&R grow in the seals and

mats sectors.

He said the purchase is another step in UP&R's plan to become a one-stop shop.

According to Colebank, immediate benefits for Crest customers by the combination of UP&R and Crest include:

- A strong support staff. UP&R has a fully staffed team and a refined product development process to ensure smooth transitions and program launches.

- Capacity. UP&R's Middlefield plant operates a variety of presses that produce molded parts for as many as seven different industries, and Crest's business will blend seamlessly into UP&R's daily production.

- Enhanced capabilities. While the companies have shared a similar historical focus, each excels in its own specific but complementary area.

UP&R was founded in 1970 as a tarp strap and gasket maker. Those products remain core to what it does today as a custom manufacturer of molded rubber parts, extruded dense and rubber products, and extruded plastic goods, Colebank said.

Its parts are used in numerous industries spread across North America.

He said that while the company produces its goods primarily for the domestic market, it maintains inter-



UP&R CEO Joe Colebank

national partnerships with Asian suppliers. That flexibility enables it to handle customers' needs across a wide variety of polymer compounds, designs, specifications and price points, he added.

Crest fits into its operation perfectly, Colebank said, especially on the seals side of its business.

Key acquisitions

UP&R has been aggressive in the marketplace for the last nine years, making four acquisitions in that span, in an effort to add to its capabilities and capacity.

Its last acquisition prior to the Crest transaction was the purchase of Universal Rubber and Plastics Corp. in 2014.

It also expanded its Middlefield plant about the same time, adding 36,000 square feet to increase the size of the factory to about 125,000 square feet.

Adding Universal Rubber to the fold gave UP&R a custom rubber product extruder that produces goods for the automotive, construction and general industrial markets operating out of its plant in Tallmadge.

It focuses on microwave-cured rubber extrusion and secondary operations, producing gaskets, bumpers, seals, bushings and shock mounts made from natural rubber, silicone, nitrile, polyurethane, butyl, neoprene and other elastomers.

Colebank said the addition of Crest and the earlier purchase of Universal Rubber are just two stepping stones on UP&R's growth path. It intends to grow further both organically and via acquisitions.

"We're pretty aggressive on acquisitions, and we have several companies we're currently looking at," he said. "Up until now we've stayed in Ohio, but we're looking outside of the state too."

He said it's too early to determine if any additions will be made in the near future.

RPN makes staff changes

AKRON—*Rubber & Plastics News* has promoted Chris Sweeney to the role of news editor and hired Michael McCrady to the newly created position of art director.

Sweeney, a reporter with *RPN* since June 2013, now will help plan the publication's news coverage and aid in overseeing the production of the issue, assisting with page design and editing. He also will continue to do some reporting.

Prior to joining *RPN*, Sweeney assisted the sports desk of *The Elyria Chronicle-Telegram* as a copy editor for two years. His duties included designing pages, editing copy and writing sports stories for the *Elyria*, Ohio-based daily newspaper. He also previously served as a freelance writer for

Cleveland Magazine, *Inside Business*, *Crain's Cleveland Business* and *Patch.com*. Sweeney was moved into his new position after Managing Editor Don Detore was named editor of *Tire Business*, a sister publication of *RPN*.

McCrady comes to *RPN* after spending more than two decades at the *Akron Beacon Journal*. He will be responsible for the page design of *RPN's* print edition. He will hold the same position with *Tire Business*.

At the *Beacon Journal*, he most recently served as supervisor for the Advertising Creative Service Department. Prior to that, he was advertising graphic artist coordinator, and graphic artist.



Sweeney



McCrady

Argen wins award, earns certification

By Miles Moore

Rubber & Plastics News Staff

CYPRESS, Texas—Argen Polymer L.L.C., a specialist in materials development, consulting, testing and analysis, just announced three new advances for the company:

- ISO accreditation in January 2017, per ISO/IEC 17025:2005;

- A new, more complete website coming online in February 2017; and

- An "Aggie 100" award from the Mays Business School at Texas A&M University, recognizing the 100 fastest-growing companies in the world owned or managed by Texas A&M students.

ISO accreditation for 5-year-old Argen Polymer is a major step forward for the company, according to founder and President Jeff Bahr.

"This accreditation is the highest internationally recognized quality standard for testing laboratories, and is a testament to both our quality management systems and our technical competence in the fields of service we offer," Bahr said.

The accreditation is the latest reflection of Argen's commitment to providing rigorous data to its customers, according to Bahr.

"Moreover, it recognizes the fact that Argen has established a quality framework to pursue continuous improvement and vigilance, and we expand our service offerings and technical capabilities," he said.

Argen received the Aggie 100 award at the November 2016 awards banquet at the Mays Business School, according to the company.

The Center for New Ventures and Entrepreneurship at Texas A&M award the Aggie 100s based on companies' compounded annual growth rates over a three-year period and their commitment to operating in a



Argen Polymer L.L.C. accepts an "Aggie 100" award from the Mays Business School at Texas A&M University. From left: Jorge Vanegas, dean, College of Architecture; Joyce Alexander, dean, College of Education and Human Development; Anthony Bahr; Jeffrey Bahr; R.C. Slocum, former Texas A&M head football coach; and Eli Jones, dean, Mays Business School.

manner consistent with the Aggie Code of Honor, Argen said.

The awards are given across all industries and are not limited to specific sectors or niches of business, according to Bahr.

"This award is a recognition and confirmation that our approach to service and customer relationships in delivering top-tier polymer testing and expertise has enabled us to grow a business that we are proud of and our customers have the utmost confidence in," he said.

The new Argen website not only highlights the company's ISO accreditation, but also gives a much more comprehensive picture of the breadth of the company's expertise and service

offerings, it said.

The website also explains Argen's "Rigorous Data and Scientific Insight" approach to polymer testing, it said.

In the summer of 2016, Argen moved to its 15,000-sq.-ft. facility in Cypress from its former headquarters in Woodland, Texas.

Since that time, Bahr said, the company has added capabilities at the Cypress facility including Notched Izod impact testing, melt flow indexing and DIN abrasion testing.

"These and other capabilities have allowed us to expand our service offerings in the realm of quality control and other testing in plastics, packaging, recycled materials and industrial rubber products," he said.