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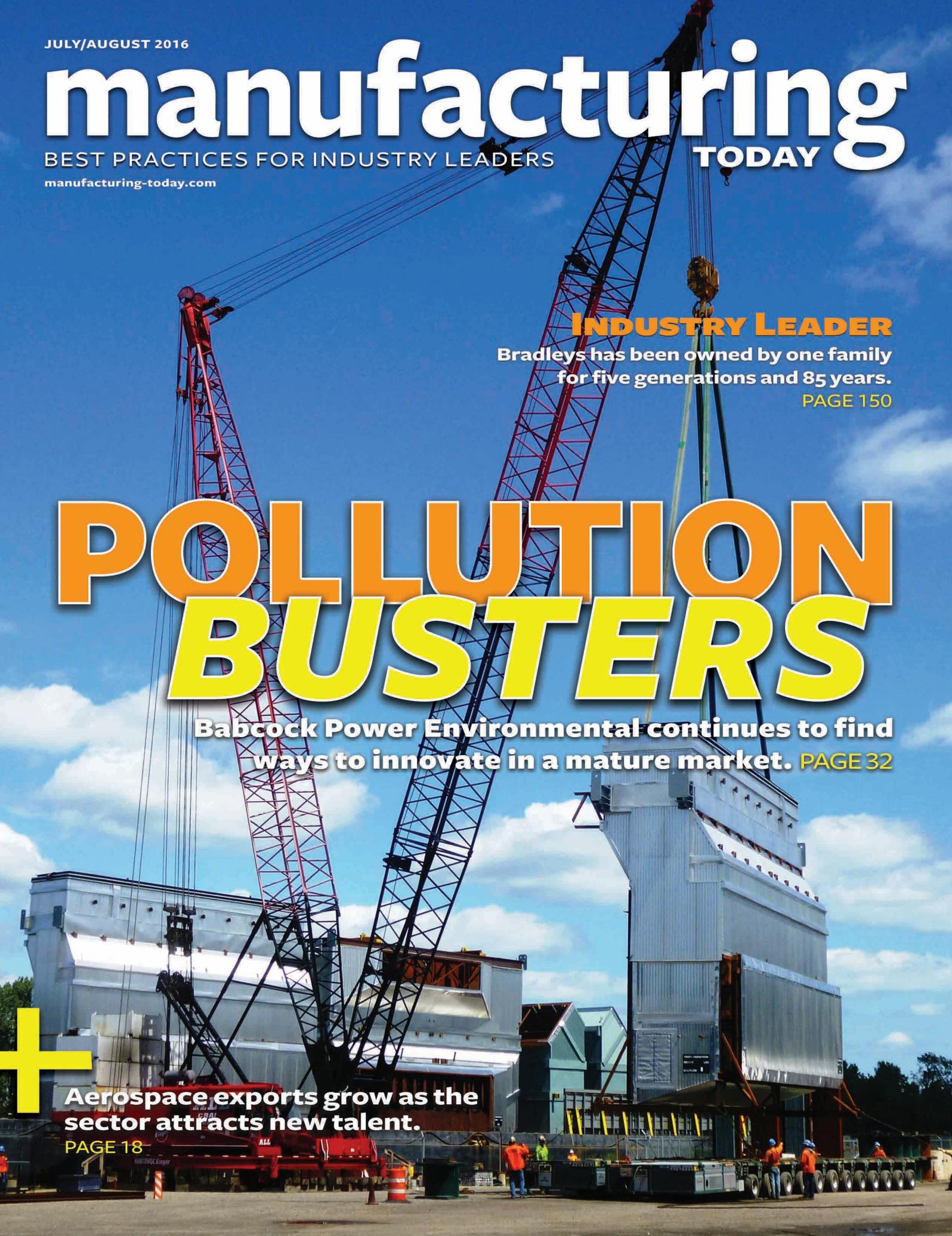
PAGE 150

# POLLUTION BUSTERS

Babcock Power Environmental continues to find ways to innovate in a mature market. PAGE 32

**Aerospace exports grow as the sector attracts new talent.**

PAGE 18





SOUTH

AUSTIN FOAM PLASTICS

[www.austinfoam.com](http://www.austinfoam.com) / HQ: Pflugerville, Texas / Employees: 224 / Rick Lange, president: "Through superior service and cost-effective and timely supply, AFP developed strong relationships."

# ENGINEERING EXCELLENCE

AUSTIN FOAM PLASTICS HAS BECOME A WELL-KNOWN ENGINEERED PACKAGING SOLUTIONS COMPANY THAT OFFERS STATE-OF-THE-ART SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVES. BY ERIC SLACK



AFP SPECIALIZES IN DESIGNING AND MANUFACTURING PROTECTIVE PACKAGING FOR COMPUTERS AND APPLIANCES.

**Formed in 1978, Austin Foam Plastics (AFP)** has been building world-class engineered packaging solutions for nearly 40 years. Initially created to meet packaging needs in Austin, Texas, the company today employs 224 employees in five facilities across the U.S. and earned revenues of over \$100 million in each of the last five years.

Founded by K. E. Kurtz II, M. Dana Kelley, Richard Lane, J. Foy Couch and Ron Holley, AFP has taken a strategic approach to growth over the years. It opened plants in Dallas in 1991, Columbus, Ohio in 1998, and Pflugerville,

Texas and LaVergne, Tenn. in 1999. AFP also opened a corrugated manufacturing facility in Austin as well as an El Paso location.

By 2003, Tim O'Hearn and K.E. Kurtz II had become the company's sole owners. A decade later, the company created a China enterprise in 2013 with the goal of entering additional geographic locations and expanding its engineering capabilities in Taiwan.

Unfortunately, 2013 also saw O'Hearn pass suddenly in a car accident. His ownership interest was handed down

to his three daughters. They have embraced their ownership and leadership roles, moving AFP forward with continued goals of growth and market leadership. The change in ownership status prompted AFP to pursue Women Owned Business Enterprise certification, allowing it to deliver direct Tier I diversity spend to its customers.

## PROVIDING VALUE

Today, AFP's specialty is in designing and manufacturing protective packaging for computers and electronics, appliances, military, automo- >>

» tive, medical and retail applications.

“With the opening of the corrugated plant, we not only fabricate the foam cushioning, we produce the corrugated solutions to go with the packs,” President Rick Lange says. “Through superior service and cost-effective and timely supply, AFP developed strong relationships and a reputation for excellent service throughout the electronics industry.”

Over time, AFP solidified relationships as a valued supplier of flexible packaging solutions with companies such as 3M, Compaq, Dell, Gateway, IBM, Flextronics, Hewlett-Packard, Lockheed Martin, Solectron and Texas Instruments. This is due to the company’s ability to create innovative custom packaging and provide first-rate customer service.

“The AFP team is committed to offering customers a dedicated team of professionals who are passionate about providing innovative and recyclable customized packaging solutions, delivering on-time quality products and reliable business solutions at a competitive price, and focused on exceeding customers’ expectations through continuous aggressive improvement,” Lange says.

AFP’s focus on continuous improvement presents opportunities with each and every customer. Its commitment to innovation in design, materials and manufacturing allows AFP to provide groundbreaking materials and exceptional performance.

“We invest in technologies and assets that deliver each customer a comprehensive, material neutral solution set,” Lange says. “AFP’s product offerings can also be married to an extensive list of customized services to deliver optimized performance and the greatest overall economic value.”

In order to further growth and vertically integrate, AFP’s corrugated plant and recycling programs at all facilities help the company lessen its carbon footprint by bringing recycled foam to market.

Human capital is another top priority for AFP. The company has high levels of employee retention, with the average being 16 years. This translates into positive relationships with customers and vendors.

An additional core competency of AFP is its vendor managed inventory program that coordinates the shipping process and produces savings in terms of raw material procurement, manufacturing efficiencies, reduced labor costs and warehousing space. Over the years, AFP has placed a number of its employees onsite with its top customers, allowing for direct interaction with the customer procurement and scheduling teams.

“This interaction has significantly reduced customers’ inventory costs and improved delivery schedules,” Lange says. “In the late 1990s, a large company wanted one invoice for all shipments sent throughout the month. AFP created summary invoicing, and that is now the standard procedure for larger customers.”

#### **ADVANCE AND AUGMENT**

To improve and enhance its service offerings, AFP’s management believes in delivering value-added services to the client base through design and engineering capabilities and outstanding customer service. This helps build strong, long-term customer relationships. AFP’s full service philosophy includes a state-of-the-art design and testing lab and the full integration of a corrugated box plant into the manufacturing process.

“This integration enables the com-

pany to offer the highest standard of service at the most competitive prices through value-added programs,” Lange says. “AFP was the first to provide a just-in-time process, delivering the material needed just for that day, allowing the customer to minimize inventory and warehousing space. Another service regularly provided is the Drop Trailer Program, where the customer pulls the packaging as needed from an onsite trailer of material.”

Ultimately, AFP engineers the protective packaging needs of customer products with material-neutral designs and environmentally friendly products, initiatives and practices. It employs a full complement of testing protocols including vibration, shock, compression and product/package testing to ensure that its designs deliver protection in today’s distributor environments.

One of its ongoing initiatives is creating a zero-carbon footprint. Scrap polyethylene material is processed through a proprietary procedure of pelletizing and returned to the manufacturer to be processed into recycled foam. AFP continues to make environmental and sustainability initiatives an ethical decision and is making investments in research and development to bring eco-friendly packaging mediums to market. The company is also hard at work staying on top of the shifts in the market so it can continue to have a place on the leading edge.

“In the past year, there has been a transition with shipping providers to apply a dimensional weight calculations to packages,” Lange says. “This can result in substantial hikes in shipping costs for larger but lighter-weight packages. We are engineering designs to optimize both the protection of products and minimization of the packaging size.” **mt**



WestRock believes that packaging matters. We want to be the right partner to help our customers achieve their goals through packaging as needs shift and change. We proudly partner with Austin Foam Plastics to provide winning answers to the range of issues businesses and supply chains face.

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