

# Popularity of fiberglass goods shapes growth at Medina firm

By **ANDREA DECKERT**

Virtual Polymer Compounds LLC, which has made products ranging from irrigation pump shelters for the Mojave Desert to parts in military vehicles, foresees new markets along with more work from current customers as the use of fiberglass products in various industries gains popularity.

The firm based in Medina, Orleans County, is one of a handful of fiberglass manufacturers in North America that supply customized products.

The business has roughly 30 workers but is hiring several more as demand for its products grows, General Manager James Heuer said.

"Our business is strong now, and we expect that to continue for some time," Heuer said.

The company does business with Fortune 500 companies, national historic attractions, the military and local governments. Customers include Alcoa Inc., General Dynamics Corp., Eastman Kodak Co., SC Johnson & Son Inc., Fort Bragg, Syracuse University, the Army Corps of Engineers and the Coast Guard.

The company's most recognizable products may be its HyTech fiberglass shelter booths, which are used as parking lot attendant shelters, ticket booths, guard shacks and kiosks at universities, airports, gas stations and theme parks across the country.

VPC began in the early 1990s, mainly doing repair and field restoration, as well as making parts for original equipment manufacturers. Over the years, VPC added custom products and expanded its

customer base through a network of representatives and distributors.

VPC's principal owner for the past several years has been Corey Hogan, an attorney in Amherst, Erie County.

The business has done a majority of work in industries such as water and wastewater, industrial and chemical. It more recently has been seeing growth in areas such as architecture, where flexible fiberglass is being used to make complex parts like decorative cornices for older buildings.

The company completed a project that involved using its fiberglass composite to construct a church steeple that concealed a cell tower in a historic area. Unlike wood or other materials, the fiberglass allowed the tower to transmit cellular signals.

Other growth markets for the company include energy and transportation.

VPC is working on a railcar refurbishment project for the Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority, focusing on the trim around the windows and doors.

The firm's products are used around the world. Companies in North America, Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Mexico, Peru and Turkey have used VPC products. The products include shelters along the Australian shoreline to protect sensitive weather equipment; troughs, weirs and baffles for municipal wastewater treatment plants; shelters designed to withstand 130-mph winds; stairs, ladders, platforms and railings; and complete manhole systems.

The company is beginning a confidential project in Vietnam.

Heuer declined to disclose revenues but said the firm has grown in each of the past five years. Sales for the first six months

of 2012 nearly match revenues for all of 2011, he said.

The company's success is due in part to the increasing use of fiberglass products as a substitute for precast concrete, particularly in the construction industry, Heuer said.

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**VPC has benefited from use of fiberglass products to replace precast concrete in construction.**

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A recent study by the firm Research and Markets projects that the demand for fiberglass products will grow nearly 5 percent annually for the next two years, with the major end user markets including the construction, automotive, consumer goods, infrastructure and transportation sectors.

Fiberglass products are manufactured from a light, non-porous substance in sturdy one-piece molds. That is in contrast to concrete, which, because of its weight, is typically created and installed in sections.

Because of their physical attributes, fiberglass products can resist radical and volatile chemical and environmental challenges, Heuer said. They do not rot, corrode or warp.

VPC has room to grow on 40 acres, and Heuer expects it will expand soon. A focus there is on green initiatives.

Heuer also expects VPC to launch new products this year that have traditionally been made of steel and cast iron.

"There are a number of possibilities," he said.

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