

Knight Material Technologies Aims At Growth With Recent Investments

by Rachel Abbey McCafferty



Knight Material Technologies in East Canton makes critical products most people would never think about: protective linings for industries working with heavy chemicals.

And the company has been investing for growth, most recently in the form of a new kiln that adds capacity at its local plant.

Knight Material makes chemical- and temperature-resistant linings for industrial vessels and tanks in industries like mining and semiconductors, things that require “aggressive chemistry,” said president Kevin Brooks. The company also designs, installs and maintains those linings, which aim to prevent dangerous chemical leaks, for its customers.

These are heavy-duty linings, often made from brick and mortar, said Mark Golla, vice president of sales and marketing, though the company also has polymer options.

“Our niche in the world is different processes where people are processing with acids that, really, no other materials will work,” Brooks said.

Knight Material’s history can be traced back more than 100 years to a company called M.A. Knight in Akron, Brooks said. At that time, “top-rate chemistry labs” used ceramic crockery, he said, which the company began making. As the processes in the chemistry industry got bigger, the industry migrated to the system of large linings that Knight Material still provides today.

The company is a global one. More than 50% of Knight Material’s sales are international, Golla said, and it has sales and manufacturing facilities worldwide.

The private equity-owned company doesn’t share annual revenue, but it has been growing in recent years, through both acquisitive and organic growth. Last spring, Knight Material acquired Electro Chemical Engineering, which makes fluoropolymer liners and added to the company’s product offerings and capabilities, Brooks said.

And, earlier this year, Knight Material installed a roller hearth kiln, adding significant capacity to its plant in East Canton. Brooks said the kiln is like a “big pizza oven,” where products roll through and are fired at high temperatures.

The benefit of roller hearth kilns is that they offer “uniformity in production, providing excellent temperature consistency, cleanliness and thermal efficacy,” while also reducing energy consumption, a news release noted. Knight Material invested about \$4 million in the new kiln, Brooks said. It was fully operational in March.

The new roller hearth kiln is supporting production of the company’s FLEXERAMIC-branded structured packing. And Knight Material will be investing another approximately \$4 million to install a new robotic production line to further support the product, Brooks said. That will ideally be up and running this fall.

The FLEXERAMIC product is “made of geometrically arranged corrugated sheets that offer improved thermal performance compared to random saddle media, including a 50% lower pressure drop and a 50% saving in production energy costs,” the release said. And it can help remove VOCs – volatile organic compounds – from production sites so they aren’t released into the air, Golla said. That might be useful at an automotive company painting vehicles, he said, or wood processing plant using glue.

Many of the markets Knight Material serves, like mining and chemical, are “fairly mature,” Golla said, so the company is always looking for new applications. For example, the company has begun offering surface protection coatings for the tanks and vessels under its liners, which can be applied during the relining process.

And Golla said Knight Material sees growth opportunities geographically, particularly in Europe and Africa, as well.

One of Knight Material’s biggest challenges is workforce, Golla said. Brooks said the company currently employs about 200 worldwide, but that it could easily grow another 20%.