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As a leader in the production of military parachutes, Mills Manufacturing's position on quality has ensured its success. PAGE 118

SPECIAL SECTION: AEROSPACE

The aerospace industry is never short on innovation, which is great news for the U.S. economy.

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HEAD OF THE CLASS

SENIOR SYSTEMS TECHNOLOGY IS GAINING MARKET SHARE AS THE RESULT OF ITS WELL-EQUIPPED MANUFACTURING PLANT AND HIGHLY SKILLED WORK FORCE. BY STACI DAVIDSON

SST'S 130,000-SQUARE-FOOT FACILITY WAS DESIGNED SPECIFICALLY TO PERFORM CONTRACT MANUFACTURING.



In the last few years, Senior Systems Technology (SST) Inc. has been named Boeing's Supplier of the Year, received the Raytheon IDS Supplier Excellence Award and was honored as a Distinguished Supplier by ITT. Many electronics manufacturers promise quality and service, but SST is gaining the attention of customers big and small by combining the state-of-the-art capabilities, technology and equipment of a large manufacturing operation with the dedication and loyal service levels of a much smaller firm.

"The care and concern our employees have for our customers and the customers' products are unmatched," stresses Gregg Mozdy, vice president of business development. "We outperform what our customers would expect. You can't buy the expertise and passion that is here, and you see it in the work we do."

Not long ago, Mozdy explains, SST was working with a Clean Technology (CleanTech) company that was trying to get into the wind power market. SST had bid on the project, but another firm's price was lower, so the CleanTech company went with the other firm. That other firm, however, was not able to ramp up in time to meet the CleanTech customer's needs, so the client turned back to SST.

"We set up the work cell, acquired the materials and built the units the customer needed, and in far less time quoted by the other manufacturer," he says. "As a result, we helped this wind energy company capture a market window that they would have missed if they had stayed with the other manufacturer."

Not only is SST's lean operation cru- >>



SST'S QUALITY CERTIFICATIONS GIVE CUSTOMERS CONFIDENCE, BUT ITS EMPLOYEES GO ABOVE WHAT CUSTOMERS EXPECT.

» cial to its service offering, but its manufacturing expertise benefits customers, as well. SST currently is helping a wireless company ramp up for a new product launch later this year while improving the client's operation in the process.

"We've developed process improvements by providing good design-for-manufacturing feedback," CEO Tim Morrissey explains. "As a result, we've increased efficiency and reduced the cost to manufacture their products."

MITIGATING RISKS

Serving the medical, defense, aerospace, CleanTech and complex commercial/industrial markets, product quality, integrity and durability is of utmost concern to SST's clients, and the company is structured to deliver. In fact, in addition to its many awards, SST has manufactured some of the technology that helps to protect

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our troops from improvised explosive devices (IEDs).

Other defense applications SST produces include specialized communications radios to aid search and rescue missions for pilots and special operations forces.

"These are considered high-cost-of-failure assemblies because performance issues could be detrimental to human life," Mozdy explains. "Customers need to know that these devices will work and always be reliable. That is a big part of what we deliver."

Based in Palmdale, Calif., the company's operations are structured to meet and exceed clients' product and production needs. SST designed its 130,000-square-foot plant specifically for contract manufacturing with a grounded floor and hookups from ceiling drops that allow it to be quickly reconfigured in response to client demand. The site can also be self-powered with a generator and uses a DI water system for electronic assembly cleaning.

Additionally, the SST plant has an isolated shipping and receiving area, which helps to keep temperature variances, moisture and dust out of the main facility, maintaining the

WEMS Electronics has been in business for 51 years. Our primary focus has been the aerospace/defense business. We provide EMI filters for defense programs for most major prime contractors including Senior Systems. We have provided on-time delivery with excellent quality. It has been a good relationship that we hope continues into the future.

environmental integrity inside the manufacturing plant. This is critical in ensuring the highest quality manufacturing processes.

“This site was designed for the exact purpose it is serving,” Morrissey says. “It is easily reconfigured to be more efficient to meet the needs of the customer. Quick ramp-up time is one of our hallmarks.”

He notes SST has “embraced the culture of continuous improvement and lean” throughout its operations. The impact on its supply chain is impressive: SST maintains greater than 99 percent inventory accuracy. The company has material when customers need it and delivers on time – it is not overbuying or over-stocking, he says.

March’s earthquake and tsunami in Japan disrupted SST’s supply chain, but it was able to find the necessary materials to come up with alternative solutions before any of its projects were affected, Mozdy explains.

“With our level of inventory accuracy, it allows us to mitigate some of that risk,” he says. “The necessary materials are more likely to be on hand because we have tight controls on our supply chain.”

This is of critical importance to our clients, Morrissey adds. “Customers are looking for risk mitigation, and a big part of that is managing your supply chain,” he says. “Through virtual warehousing, we work with partners to ensure some materials are always in the pipeline. If you’re just managing your own stockroom, you’re more susceptible to the problems of the outside world.”

BUILDING UP THE BASE

The SST plant’s certifications include ISO 13485:2003; ISO 9001:2008; AS9100 for the aerospace industry; FDA license to manufacture medical devices; IPC 610 Class I, II, III workmanship standards; and J-STD-001 for soldering techniques. These certificates boost client confidence in

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the operation, but SST relies on its skilled work force to go above and beyond what clients expect. The company utilizes in-house trainers to ensure it complies with industry standards and that the staff is knowledgeable of the latest techniques. It also sends a number of employees to leadership and executive training on a regular basis.

“This is definitely a learning culture,” Morrissey says. “Our people enjoy gaining more knowledge that will benefit our customers. Additionally, each quarter, if we are injury-free, we provide a safety luncheon and prizes for employees. We implemented this

program in 2005, and our best record so far is going nearly 1,600 days without an injury.”

With a skilled and safe employee base, SST is confident in its ability to grow. The company is diversifying the markets it serves, Mozdy notes, and continues to engage the medical market, strengthen its position in the defense and aerospace sectors and increase its activity in CleanTech. Geographically, its traditional market is Southern California, but SST has placed sales representatives in Northern California, the Pacific Northwest and the Southwest to grow its customer base.

“Our employees’ dedication and commitment to build very high-quality assemblies – including serving the military by building products that help save lives – makes me very proud, and is key to our growth,” Morrissey says. “We have a well-grounded work force with extensive experience and an impressive skill set. Customers look to us because of those strengths.” **mt**

