



The OpenLine

For Clients of the Construction Industry

Volume 13, Number 2 - Spring-Summer 2003

Garibaldi Glass Industries Inc.

Brothers turned company around: Now ready to leap ahead



Ceramic frit supervisor Gary Beauchesne, above, fits a squeegee to the silk screen machine he helped design. Innovation at all levels in the company is encouraged, leading to the development of a printing table that allows them to handle large, 80-inch by 156-inch sheets of glass, depending on a particular project's application. "We're in the process of building a second machine with some refinements and simplifications to improve quality control and efficiency," Mr. Beauchesne notes. Below, he replaces the screen used for decorating panels (see detail underneath) at the new Surrey Tech Centre on King George Highway, far right.

BC's own Garibaldi Glass Industries is about to become the most modern, efficient, and high-tech glass producer in the whole of Canada when it installs three new pieces of equipment at its production facilities in Burnaby.

For a company that was insolvent in 1983, that's quite an achievement, and one that the three Mobius brothers are justly proud.

Eldest brother, and president of the company, Carey, was still in high school when his father died in 1980, leaving behind a successful business he had started in Squamish in 1966 and had grown to 50 employees.

Just three years later, under the management of two executors, the company had been run into the ground and was down to just four employees.



Carey took over when he was 19, while his 15-year-old younger brother Chris - who is now vice president - helped out evenings and weekends. Youngest brother Craig also joined in and is now in sales and marketing.

They gradually started rebuilding the premises they had in North Vancouver, taking over more and more space as they expanded their glazing contracting and small, own-use glass manufacturing capabilities.

Then, in 1990, they bought a new tempering furnace - in pieces - and rebuilt it over the next six months, taking orders for their business during the day, and then working by night to put their new equipment together.

By 1994 they had started their own in-house training programs, giving their increasing workforce opportunities to become skilled in all phases of their operation - from cutting and fabricating; tempering in a furnace; making insulated glass panels; through applying ceramic screen printed frits into the glass; and then to shipping.

Although they were manufacturing some of their own glass,



they still bought most of their supplies from other, local manufacturers and when one of their main suppliers was bought out by a competitor, they decided it was time to rethink what they were doing.



The Mobius brothers - Carey, left, Chris and Craig - have created a vibrant, expanding business that is keeping approximately 90 employees (themselves included) employed year round. There have been no layoffs due to lack of work since they opened up new export markets three years ago.

"Our industry was changing, so we decided to make a move," Carey says.

That "move" was a decision to leave their 12,000 sq. ft. facilities in North Vancouver for a new, 50,000 sq. ft building in Burnaby, and change the nature of their business from approximately 50% glass manufacturing and 50% installation work to manufacturing only.

That was in 1997.

"At first, we had to continue the installation work to maintain our revenue," Chris says, "but we were competing with our own markets so as soon as we reached revenue crossover with our new manufacturing - in about 1998-'99 - we were able to shut down that side of the business."

Their concern was to maintain the workforce - they currently have about 90 employees, themselves included - and wanted to avoid having to lay anyone off.

In fact, that concern for their "family" has led them to developing new markets in the United States. Those markets have grown over the past three years to where they now account for approximately 25% of the company's total revenue.

"Our markets spike up in summer and in fall but then always drop in spring," Carey explains, "so we went looking for new markets to fill in those slow times."

What they found were specialty and niche markets that



All the glass in this tower at 401 Burrard Street in Vancouver is typical of the product produced by Garibaldi.

demanded high-quality glass items that had been machined extremely accurately for attachments - high-end doors, shower stalls, and other items destined to become building features in their own right.

They soon installed equipment to allow them to service those markets efficiently.

"Since we started exporting to the States three years ago, we've had no layoffs due to lack of work," Carey proudly announces.

It is innovations like that, plus a flexible workforce, that is allowing Garibaldi to make strides in their growth, while ensuring job security for increasing numbers of employees.

Already, most employees can operate several machines, Chris points out, and they are developing a program to encourage each employee to train on every workstation.

"It's that sort of flexibility - where employees have the ability and the interest to work in all phases of the business - that keeps us competitive and efficient," Carey adds. "It's the best job security for all of us."

New equipment includes a new stainless steel washing machine and special impurity filters to clean the glass before feeding the panels to the convection tempering furnace; a new insulated glass line to remove the need to touch the glass by hand - thus preventing any contamination - and a new CNC (computer numerically controlled) drill and mill to improve accuracy and efficiency for specialty export products, which will in turn open doors to new, demanding export customers.

"We're predicting that within the next decade, there won't be a piece of glass that doesn't have some kind of coating on it,"



Specialty and niche markets that demand high-quality glass items that have been machined extremely accurately for attachments - high-end doors as used in this storefront for example - have allowed Garibaldi to find export customers to even out the ups and downs of marketplace cycles, thus ensuring year-round employment and avoiding layoffs due to market fluctuations.

Chris points out. "We're getting prepared for that."

But in the meantime they're not resting on their laurels.

"We spend an awful lot of time developing new products and markets as part of our overall philosophy and core values," Carey says.

Those core values are: "innovation; flexibility; making our customers' lives easier; and creating an enjoyable, relaxed atmosphere at work.

"We're not perfect at that yet - by any means - but that's what we're striving for."

When you consider that three of the original four employees remaining at the company in 1983 are still working for Garibaldi, the Mobius brothers may be further along in their aspirations than they admit.

Volume 13, Number 2 - Spring-Summer 2003
