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TODAY

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NEW HEIGHTS

Celebrating 25 years in 2016, Inteplast Group has a systematic approach for success. PAGE 18

DELIVERING POWER

American Axle & Manufacturing is leaping past competitors in the all-wheel-drive space. PAGE 40

Women make major strides in manufacturing.



PUSHING ON

ACCOR TECHNOLOGY
CONTINUES TO GROW ITS
FACILITY TO MEET DEMAND.

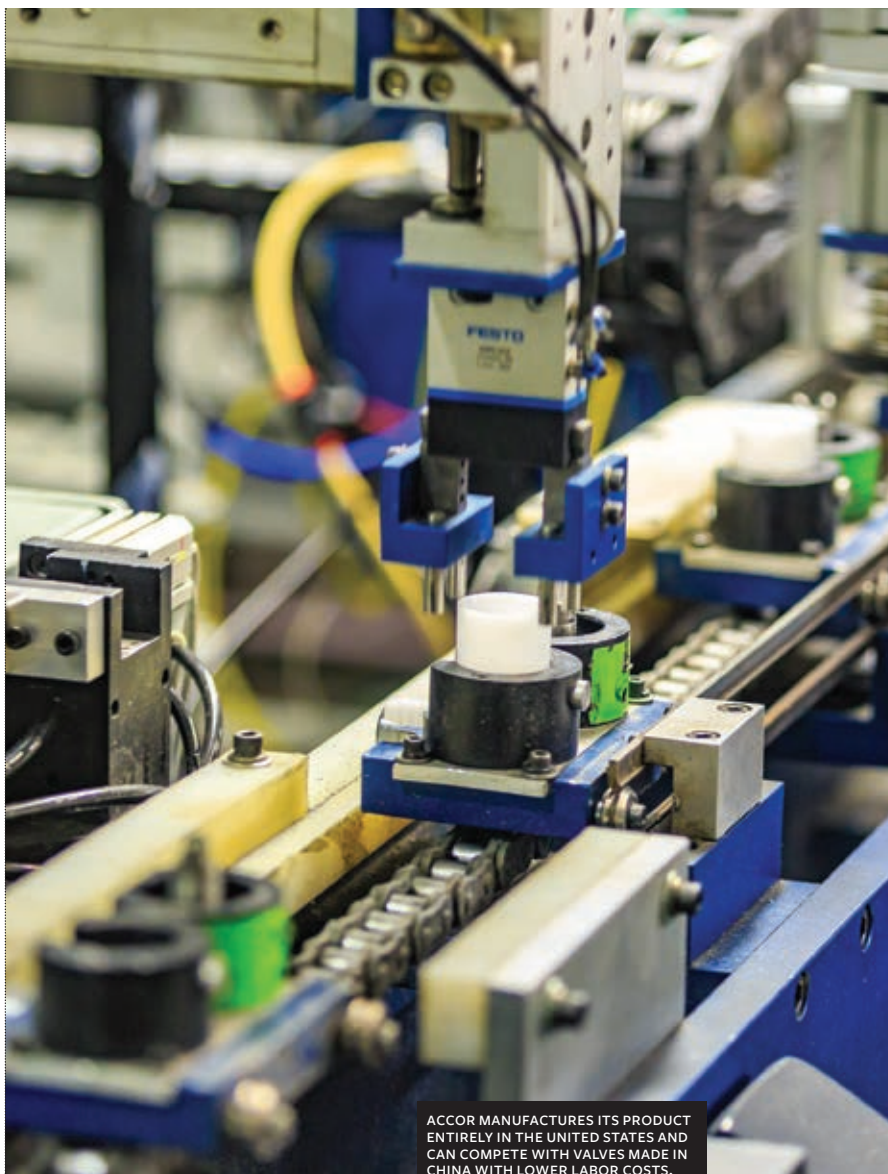
BY STEPHANIE CRETS

Pioneering the first push-fit supply stop valve for plumbing fixtures, ACCOR Technology has created an entirely new plumbing technology category that has since brought other manufacturers into the fold. Since its inception in 1988, ACCOR has striven to design and manufacture American-made, innovative, health-safe plumbing fittings that are easy to install, reliable and cost-effective.

President Jerry O'Neill partnered with Rawley Taplett, the largest independent apple grower in Wenatchee, Wash., to create ACCOR Technology, based on the idea for a push-fit valve that could be installed without using tools. After a few years of research and development, O'Neill began filing patents for a new push-fit coupling technology with the vision of incorporating this technology into many types of plumbing fittings.

"We chose to improve a ubiquitous product called the angle-stop valve that's under every kitchen sink in America," O'Neill says. "Incorporating the patented PUSHON technology into the angle-stop valve proved to be a game changer in the marketplace."

ACCOR started from scratch, raising its capital from private investors. O'Neill, a Michigan Technological University graduate with 16-years experience with Owens Corning, trademarked the name, PUSHON, and gradually rolled out his product into



ACCOR MANUFACTURES ITS PRODUCT ENTIRELY IN THE UNITED STATES AND CAN COMPETE WITH VALVES MADE IN CHINA WITH LOWER LABOR COSTS.

the construction industry. "We then developed a family of products based on the core design and functionality of this PUSHON technology, which could also be integrated into all future products," O'Neill explains. "We were the pioneers of push-fit technology in the U.S. markets."

ACCOR then went state by state to obtain plumbing code approvals. This proved to be a difficult task because the PUSHON valve is made from polymers versus traditional brass and

utilizes a different application for connecting to the pipe. "I guess you could say we were disruptive in the market because we were introducing something that wasn't the old soldering and gluing," O'Neill says. "It was completely different in that all you had to do was push the valve onto the pipe."

O'Neill's idea proved successful and eventually the innovative product took off in the marketplace. ACCOR focused primarily on the residential housing market and companies that

build single-family homes, hotels and multifamily apartments. The product's one-valve-fits-all technology makes it easy for plumbers, wholesalers, builders and consumers to buy only one product, available under two brands FlowTite and PUSHON, that fits all different pipes, whether copper, CPVC or PEX.



MADE IN U.S.A.

One of ACCOR's goals was to manufacture its product entirely in the United States, which is how its factory came to be located in Wenatchee. It continues to work solely with U.S.-made materials that it assembles itself. But with product demand increasing since the early 2000s, ACCOR realized it needed to automate and speed up productivity.

Since its product is so unique, ACCOR needed a one-of-a-kind automation machine. With an excellent technical team, the company created two high-tech robotics systems to increase productivity and to control quality, doing all the engineering, programming and construction in-house.

"We compete directly with brass valves that are made in China with much lower labor costs," O'Neill explains. "The only way to preserve our business in the U.S. is to invest in automation machines that would decrease our variable labor substantially. That not only gave us the capacity to make a lot more valves, but it also decreased our variable cost per part while preserving our high quality."

Now, ACCOR is adding more robotics to its factory, which it is expanding by 40 percent. New construction will begin in 2016 and is projected to be completed in about a year's time. With a larger space and expanded workforce, the company will be able to roll out several new product line extensions of its PUSHON technology in the next year. "Most people think that automation means reduced employment; however, with ACCOR the increase in productivity simply means we are able to compete with foreign imports, which means we will grow our business and our workforce," O'Neill says.

ONE-OF-A-KIND

Today, one-third of all homes built in the United States now use ACCOR's FlowTite Supply Stop valve system. The ACCOR valve is simply pushed onto the pipe stub-out and then hand-tightened to the fixture or appliance. The one-piece system, an industry first, eliminates joint leaks with its factory-attached connector. ACCOR's patents assure a higher margin of safety than any competitor, especially on PEX pipe, due to its patented dual gripper ring design.

ACCOR says its written 10-year residential warranty, including labor, is the strongest in the industry. This reduces liability for both builders and plumbers related to potential leak problems.

"Quality control is paramount for our company," O'Neill adds. "Our internal processes and customer service are aligned with our quality commitment."

Internally, ACCOR's people are all cross-trained. Every 30 minutes, factory workers switch to a different job.



WITH MORE AUTOMATION AND ITS ENHANCED PRODUCTIVITY, ACCOR IS GROWING ITS BUSINESS AND WORKFORCE.

PRESIDENT AND CEO JERRY O'NEILL STRESSES THAT QUALITY IS PARAMOUNT FOR ACCOR.



O'Neill believes this reduces boredom, mistakes, carpal tunnel syndrome and a variety of other issues that could adversely affect the manufacturing process. "The productivity of our factory and its ability to service customer needs within a five-day shipping cycle requires a focused coordination between our sales team forecasting and our manufacturing team," he says.

"We're all striving for the same thing with our business planning and implementation of the plan. The key to manufacturing is forecasting your volume and usage of resources."

ACCOR has managed to build a viable company in the plumbing industry from the ground up.

"I'm proud that we were a pioneer and part of the change of something that was quite dramatic for a slow-to-change market," O'Neill explains.

"We were one of the key players to facilitate change in a slow-changing industry." **mt**