

Solar Compounds

Compounding Success with Innovation

Horatio Alger and John Rockefeller would feel at home at Solar Compounds Corporation. The Linden-based company embodies every trait associated with the rags-to-riches author and turn-of-the-century industrialist – hard work, opportunism and innovation.

Solar Compounds is a developer and manufacturer of sealants, adhesives and coating compounds for the wire and cable industry, government and military. Yet the company's foundation is in asphalt.

“Solar Compounds was founded in 1920 by two returning World War I veterans,” said Joe Barbanel, the company's executive vice president. “The magic word that kept getting whispered to them was asphalt. World War I was over. Prosperity was beginning. We were just starting to leave the cities to branch out into the suburbs. There was a need for asphalt for roofing, for roads. It was a huge marketplace.”

Like two Alger characters, the veterans set to work filling that need.

“They became very proficient in developing new applications for asphalt,” Barbanel explained. “One of the areas where they had particular success was in insulation for wire and cable for transmission of electrical power, and a new-fangled thing being developed, the telephone.

“Here we are in the 21st Century and you don't hear a lot of ads for wire – you hear plenty of ads for wireless. So Solar Compounds is constantly in the position of having to reinvent itself.”

Like Rockefeller, who revolutionized the oil industry through innovation, Solar Compounds prides itself on developing new solutions for customer needs.

“It's easy to say we make compounds for wire and cable,” Barbanel said. “What we are really in the business of doing is problem solving. We try to find people who have a specific coating need, regardless of their industry. We ask them what they are trying to do that they cannot do and then help them differentiate themselves to their customers. We have the ability to bring epoxy, urethane, silicone, acrylic, hot melt and hybrid chemistries to the problems, as well as asphalt.”

One of those needs has been in the making for decades.

Following the close of the Vietnam War, the United States reduced investment in the military, Barbanel explains. At the same time, U.S. businesses were refocusing from manufacturing to the service economy.

As a result, the development of manufacturing processes stalled, Barbanel said, citing as example a current shortage of varying types of ammunition for sport shooting.

“It's not that we do not have the metal or that we are missing the parts,” he said.

“In many cases we are missing the process.”

Finishing and labeling parts, typically done with some form of paint, is one such process.

“In some cases you have to stand there and wait for the paint to dry,” Barbanel explains. “While you are waiting for the paint to dry, the solvents used to make that paint are evaporating and going into the atmosphere. As a society we decided that is something we do not like.”

Enter opportunity.

Ultra violet technology can be found everywhere from water treatment to nail salons. Solar Compounds has developed one more application.

“By using advanced ultra violet curing technology, we have the ability to enable someone who is finishing a metal part to shine a light on it and in an instant, that part is dry,” Barbanel said. “The environmental impact is non-existent because all of the elements that go into the coating stay in the coating.”

Making the leap from asphalt maker to high-tech developer and manufacturer requires constant advancement. Solar Compounds maintains a staff that comprises chemists, engineers, skilled batch makers, laboratory technicians and quality assurance and documentation experts. Ten percent of the company's staff is involved with product development.

The company also stays closely tuned to customers, suppliers and the industry in general.

“We focus on what the industry is focusing on and what makes technical and economic sense for us,” Barbanel said. “You need to marry the two. You need to assure that you are using your scarce resources productively – working on projects that really have a future.”

It is a proven strategy.

“It goes back our core philosophy of how we've conducted business since 1920,” Barbanel said. “That core philosophy is as relevant to customers today as it was back then. Great customer service never goes out of fashion.”

Nor do hard work, opportunism and innovation. Ask Horatio Alger and John Rockefeller.

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