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# Who knew they made it here?

BY CLARK MILLER

The Grand Traverse region’s manufacturing community includes a global industry leader, AlcoTec Wire Corporation. The 170-employee firm claims to be the largest provider of aluminum welding wire in the world ... by far.

AlcoTec is a long-established part of the local business scene. Plant manager James Thomas said the plant “hasn’t had a lot of ebb and flow in its workforce, sales have grown and the company has been very successful for 34 years.”

He cited several reasons for the company’s growth and success:

**Popularity of aluminum**

Aluminum makes things stronger, faster and lighter. That can be important for transportation-related industries looking for ways to reduce fuel usage.

Thomas expects no sales downturn in his business due to new U.S. tariffs on Chinese aluminum imports.

“At this time, we’re not impacted by national or international events,” he said. “We source the majority of our raw material from inside the U.S.”

Indeed, he says he believes Asia-Pacific and European Union countries are promising sales targets.

**Diverse customer base**

Having a dependable and diverse base of direct customers and end users is another stabilizing factor for AlcoTec.

The company’s largest customer segments include major gas and welding suppliers, makers of truck trailers and the automotive industry. AlcoTec also provides welding wire to boat manufacturers and technologically advanced companies in the nuclear-generating, aerospace, hybrid automobile and green energy sectors,

Thomas said. In addition, the company’s products are “Buy American” compliant, which aids the company in applying for government contracts.

**Top-notch workforce**

Market factors aside, Thomas said AlcoTec’s skilled workforce is the company’s “most important” asset and main reason for its continued success.

AlcoTec relies on recruiting, training and retaining skilled trades people in key positions such as “wire drawers,” an industry term for those who reduce, or draw down, large aluminum rods into a smaller diameter. Once the rods are drawn down, they go to the finished goods producers, who are responsible for turning the rods into market-ready products.



**Fast pace**

AlcoTec is busy. It runs two, 12-hour shifts around the clock, seven days a week.

“We close down only 10 days a year for holidays. Otherwise, we’re open every day of the year,” Thomas said.

Continuous production places high demand not only on employees but also on the machinery. There’s plenty of new technology in place at the plant, but Thomas said some of the best equipment has been around for decades, which means the maintenance team has an

important role to play in preventing and fixing mechanical problems.

Once the welding wire is made, it gets shipped. AlcoTec’s shipping and receiving department

“moves millions upon millions of pounds of product every year,”

Thomas said.

Rounding out the AlcoTec employee base are on-site customer service representatives, office staff, quality assurance professionals and application, or welding, engineers, which Thomas called “among the best welders in the world.”

Thomas is decidedly upbeat about the future.

“We’ve seen substantial growth – even in the double digits – during a good three-year trend. We hired 12 new employees in the past two months. And I expect those trends to continue.”

AlcoTec is a wholly owned subsidiary of Swedish industrial company ESAB, which, in turn, is owned by the publicly traded and Maryland-based Colfax Corp.