

MAKING IT  
IN NORTHERN  
MICHIGAN



GTAMC

## WHO KNEW THEY MADE IT HERE?



By Clark Miller

As a kid, Paul Britten Jr. had a head full of ideas. His dad, founder of Britten Inc., had a standard reply: “Build one.”

When the younger Britten took over leadership of the family business and got interested in getting into the van and trailer conversion business, he put his father’s advice into practice. With five major divisions to look after, he just needed the right person to lead the charge.

That’s when carpenter, skier and traveler David Truax showed up for a job interview driving a van he’d personally converted and lived in for 18 months. He got the job.

Along with upholstery supplier Neuco Seating, the company’s team of carpenters, welders and design engineers has just finished a prototype van using a stripped-down 2020 Ford Transit 350.

“When we bought the truck, it was a shell,” Truax said. “The back end had no insulation; no finished flooring.”

He said van conversions can be complicated, even for a company that thinks big and has lots of in-house talent.

“One of the first things you do is cut big holes into the roof and the side of the vehicle,” Truax said. “That can be a bit intimidating.”

Originally, the plan was to focus on creating campers for the general market, but that’s changed. By design, the finished van resembles a mobile office more than it does a weekend toy. Future models of vans (and trailers) could be equipped for bicycle repair services or as corporate entertainment centers on wheels.

Truax said if all goes well, the company

might someday develop a catalogue of standardized models, but he added that even if that occurs, his team will customize the finished product to fit the needs of customers.

The refocus toward business customers has several advantages. It allows Britten Inc. to target its extensive base of former and current clients across the U.S. It also dovetails with the addition of TruckSkin (wraps), a service Britten Inc. sold to a former employee but has recently bought back.

Paul Britten Jr. said the new, business-to-business emphasis better fits the core mission of the company to “innovate and manufacture products that help businesses grow.”

He says he knows a new product line can strengthen a company, but that happens only if it addresses a need.

“That’s why we’re letting demand lead innovation and investment,” he said.

Big-picture market factors are encouraging. Business performance in van and trailer conversions is brisk. One example: Last year, Airstream experienced a 22% jump in demand.

Britten Jr. thinks he’s found a potential new profit center. Company leadership, he said, is fully committed.

“It’s only been six months. We’re still learning a lot from customers,” he said.

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*The mission of the Grand Traverse Area Manufacturing Council (GTAMC) is to support a sustainable and globally competitive manufacturing sector for a stronger economy. Learn more at [makegreatthings.org/](http://makegreatthings.org/)*