



Acrotech team members (kneeling, from left) Kevin Hurta, Mike Nelson, (standing, from left) Joe White, Andy Oliver, Dale Gluesen, Cody Mortenson, Mitch Weckerling, Travis Walker, Nate Larson, Dan Peterson, Cory Meyer, Anthony Klennert, Jim Schively, Schatney Sanders, Hanna Schively, Bob Linder, Jessie Carlson, Corey Laqua, Joe Morrill, Lucas Krause, Diane Lynch, Jessica Schultz, Brendan Lange, Jeremy Kahl, Adam Dahlstrom, Lori Fritz, (not pictured) Ken Mustain, and Austin O'Flaherty.

Acrotech marks 40 years in business

After commemorating the shipping of its 500th rolling machine last spring, Acrotech Inc. celebrates forty years of business.

Acrotech, established in February of 1984, was a partnership between Richard Huppert, Dale Oliver, and Leon Rutz.

All three were employed at Di-Acro, then a major employer in Lake City and a manufacturing leader in the fabricating equipment industry. It was located on 7th street at the current location of the original Hearth and Home Technologies building.

In 1984 the company was consolidating its operations in New York and closing its Lake City plant, leaving Huppert, Oliver, Rutz, and most of the other employees in search of employment.

Among Di-Acro's Lake City operations was a small urethane facility, Dale said. It had been acquired when Di-Acro bought its previous owner.

The three partners heard it was for sale and decided to buy it and go into business for themselves.

The purchase agreement included urethane manufacturing equipment, various molds, customer lists, patterns, and trademarks. The three owners started out in a 2,100 square foot building on the north end of town they leased from Gene Glander.

Dale recalls it being a little "spooky" at the time.

"We didn't know a whole lot about running a business, and we knew nothing about urethane," Dale said.

What they did have were

complementary skillsets. One was an engineer, one was a machine shop manager, and Dale was in marketing and sales and had been a draftsman earlier in his career.

And fortunately they were able to hire someone who had worked in the urethane facility, and Di-Acro was happy the urethane business had found a new owner and was very helpful in the early going.

"If they could lend us a hand or give us some hints, they were right there doing it," Dale said.

The first few years focused on the production of urethane components used in the metal forming industry. This included press brake dies, die springs, punch strippers, and die inserts. In 1987 they manufactured and shipped the first rolling machine. And they

also started attending trade shows that year.

Initially urethane components were offered in only a few options and processed through one mixing machine.

In 1993 Acrotech started hand batching urethane resins to address the increasing need for smaller quantity specialty items. This was the beginning of a new phase, custom molded offerings. This is where Acrotech has seen a majority of its growth.

The original location grew through expansion to 7,000 square feet before relocating to a 28,000 square foot facility in 1997. It's the current location on Lakewood Avenue. At the time of the move, they had 21 employees.

Dale Oliver was the sole owner after Rutz retired in 1986 and Huppert in 1990. Dale later transferred the

business to his sons Paul and Andy Oliver in 2004 when he retired. Today Andy is the sole proprietor.

Andy said he started at Acrotech out of necessity. He had just finished college and needed a job.

“After being here for a while, I realized that this is what I wanted to do,” he said.

Acrotech completed another 8,000 square foot expansion in 2013 and currently employs approximately thirty.

Acrotech is a captive shop producing most of the molds in-house with multiple CNC and manual machines. Acrotech has several mixing machines and hand batch stations to process a variety of urethane components. They have capacity to machine, fabricate, paint, and complete electrical, pneumatic, and hydraulic assemblies as well.

Today Acrotech catalogs a large selection of stock products and continues to service the metal forming industry, along with a few other niche markets. Acrotech offers over 15 different urethane options including FDA approved materials.

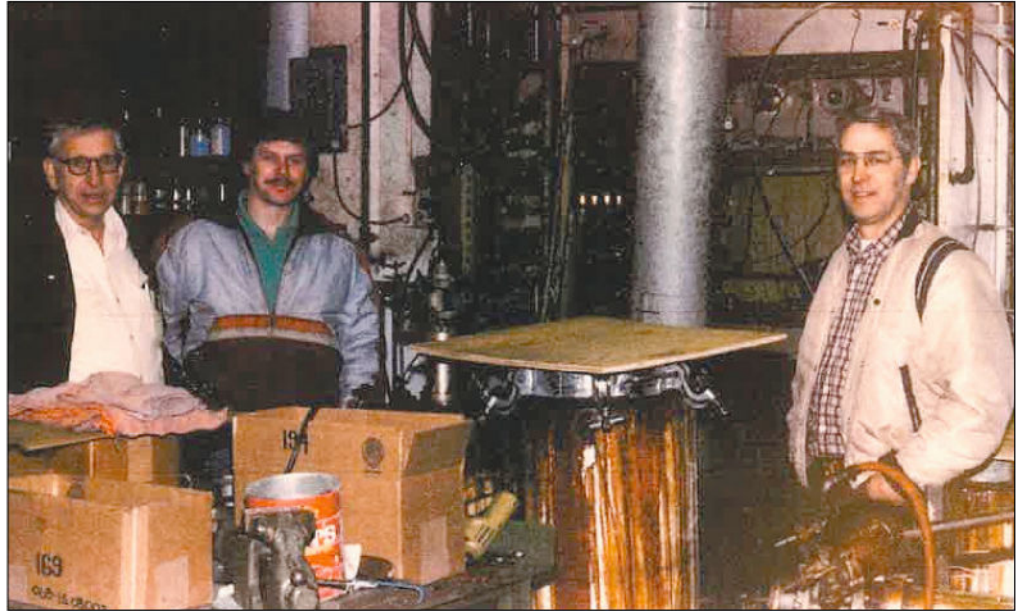
“We’re pretty diverse right now. We don’t have one particular market,” Andy said. “We’re in high performance racing, ... ag, metal forming, metal fabrication, OEM replacements.”

Currently there are over 21,000 active part numbers and 9,000 active customers. Products are shipped locally, all over the United States, and globally.

As it turns 40, Acrotech is trying to do more community outreach because—despite its longevity and being at the same location for the past 27 years—local awareness isn’t what they’d like it to be.

“The biggest thing you hear around town is ‘What do you guys do up there?’” Andy said.

They’ve held some open houses and tours for high school students, which has helped, plant manager Joe White said.



A photo of the three Acrotech founders from early in the company’s history. From left are Leon Rutz, Dale Oliver, and Richard Huppert.

They’re unsure if they’ll have an event celebrating the company’s 40th anniversary. Acrotech has been around longer than some might have predicted.

“I’m sure that 40 years ago, there were a lot of people that knew us three that said ‘They won’t be here in a year,’” Dale said. “So 40 years is quite an accomplishment.”