

Long-Stanton puts its stamp on things

WEST CHESTER — Dan Cunningham, president and chief executive of Long-Stanton Manufacturing Co. Inc., walks across his plant floor to the beat of a 300-ton Minster stamping press throwing out metal drywall brackets.

The CEO stops, a smile spreading across his face.

"You hear that press running?" Cunningham asked. "That's the sound of money."

After weathering what he calls a manufacturing "depression" in the last five years without laying employees off, it's a sound he likes very much.

Long-Stanton has found stability in a \$27 billion metal stamping and fabrication market by taking on manufacturing tasks its customers need but don't want to perform themselves. And by responding when opportunity knocks.

In 2001, company leaders learned that Middletown's AK Steel Corp. was building a "concept home" outside Los Angeles. Steel going into the 11,000-square-foot home was to be coated with a special compound that inhibits the growth of microbes.

A Long-Stanton employee since 1982 and CEO since 1998, Cunningham was intrigued. He contacted AK's Research and Development department on Curtis Street, and soon a partnership ensued.

One result was Long-Stanton's six-week fabrication of a 5,000-bottle wine rack for the residents of the Simi Valley home, an entertainment attorney and his wife. The rack is made of AK-produced, compound-coated steel, steel which Cunningham believes has applications in hospitals, restaurants, residential kitchens and elsewhere.

"Holy cow, it's a great thing," Cunningham declared.

Robert Morgan, a member of Long-Stanton's board of directors and former president of Cincinnati Financial Corp., said the firm also makes light-switch plates with the antimicrobial coating. It's that kind of product that helped the business weather the recession.

"They're really dealing in value-added products," Morgan said.

Through that partnership Cunningham met Richard Wardrop, then AK's chairman and CEO. After Wardrop left AK in September 2003 by agreement with AK's board of directors, Cunningham occasionally met with Wardrop. When they spoke, it was clear Wardrop remained interested in Long-Stanton, Cunningham recalled.

Cunningham heard opportunity knocking again.

Earlier this month, the 9388 Summit Place company announced that Wardrop, a resident of Warren County's Clearcreek Township, had joined its board of directors.

"He has a love of manufacturing," Cunningham said.

Wardrop could not be reached for this story.

With 64,000 square feet of plant and 60 full-time employees — about half of them live in Middletown and Hamilton — closely held Long-Stanton saw about \$10 million in revenue in 2004. Cunningham thinks the company can come close to doubling that by 2008. Productivity has improved, as have key measurements like rejected parts per million.

Cunningham showed off two presses, both computer controlled. Unlike other manufacturers, Long-Stanton is hiring, but the company needs workers experienced at operating CNC (Computer Numerically Controlled) presses.

The Minster press is fast, but requires a special tool or insert to make some parts, Cunningham said. Another machine, a computerized precision turret press, is slower, but can take five-by-10-foot steel sheets and make parts without special tools.

"We can make one at a time or a million of them," said Tom Kachovec, Long-Stanton general manager. "It doesn't matter."

Asked about the possibility of a third plant, Cunningham said it's on the horizon, but he's proceeding with deliberation. If he had expanded in 2000 — a possibility he entertained at the time — he would have found himself paying for a new building in the midst of a recession.

Said Cunningham: "The thing about innovation is: It's not forecastable."