

Shop Feature

Milwaukee Platers Turn Brownfields Site Into Elite Finishing Jobshop

A group in Milwaukee, WI, has taken a brownfields site off the government's list by cleaning it up and building a state-of-the-art plating facility.

Elite Finishing, LLC, was conceived by the Maliszewski brothers (Jack, Jeff and Jaime, who are third-generation electroplaters and owners of Reliable Plating Works in Milwaukee), and Dave Scherzer and Ken Kaszubowski, (of the Sigma Group, which includes Sigma Environmental, Sigma Development, and Sigma Leasing). The group formed a partnership and developed plans to buy a brownfields site, bring it into compliance and get a plating facility up and running.

The ground at the selected site was contaminated with petroleum-based compounds. Sigma took on clean-up of the project, which included overseeing improvements to ensure compliance, such as paving the grounds, and remodeling and expanding the existing building to accommodate the new finishing line. State and county grants for converting brownfields sites into productive real estate were used to pay for clean-up and capping of the site. The ownership team set goals of developing a workforce for the operation that included technical excellence and the best work ethic, use of the best available technology and chemistry, and application of the best available business practices.

Innovative Planning

This "thinking outside of the box" approach was employed from start to finish, with building and operating the new line. The Maliszewskis assembled a team of suppliers, contractors and customers to get expert advice in every step. Harley Davidson Motor Company, for example, sent a team of experts to help develop processes and requirements for the top-end chromium line. A long-time customer of Reliable Plating, Harley Davidson was one of the first customers of Elite Finishing. The result of this collaboration is a newly designed proprietary chemistry that provides a high-quality finish on aluminum parts for Harley Davidson. According to Jaime Maliszewski, it gives the parts a unique finish with more corrosion resistance than comparable finishes.



Elite Finishing's plating line is completely automatic, with lots of room for expansion. This photo was taken during the company's open house. The copper plating side is on the left while the right side is the cleaning cycle. The nickel/chromium section cannot be seen from this angle.

The New Line

The plating line is providing exclusive, top-quality copper/nickel/chromium on aluminum parts for companies such as Harley Davidson. It is also used for depositing the same finish on brass for plumbing, such as top-of-the-line faucets and bathroom fixtures. Local plumbing manufacturer Kolbe & Kolbe was one of the first to take advantage of the new process.

Elite has one plating line designed in three side-by-side stages. The line includes 56 tanks for cleaning, pretreatment, plating and rinsing at various stages. One unique feature is that plating racks are stripped in line on every cycle to ensure that a high-quality finish is maintained. Polishing of the parts is out-sourced to two local companies (Polco Metal Finishing and Ace Polishing). Both specialize in the process.

The first part of the line is the copper plating side. Parts are inspected after completion of this process before being sent to the duplex nickel/chromium line for finishing. The line includes six automated hoists from start to finish.

Waste treatment was designed, built, and is managed by the Sigma Group. Because the company is a partner in the venture, an approach that goes beyond compliance in every area is the standard. Sigma's staff consists of registered professional engineers, certified hazardous materials managers, certified professional geol-

ogists, and certified hydrogeologists, so it is well equipped and experienced to handle any aspect of waste treatment, compliance, and pollution prevention.

Forming an expert team to work together to build the new line also turned out to be a plus in the timetable for getting the company up and running. It took only six months from conception to start-up. Some suppliers that were instrumental in achieving this included Jessup Engineering, Aldonex, Inc., and Lanco Equipment.

Because of the experience and background of the owners, Elite Finishing gained an edge by becoming a member of Brilliance, LLC—Milwaukee's largest plating group—which is made up of Artistic Plating Company, Chrometech of Wisconsin, and Reliable Plating Works, Inc. The move gives Elite instant buying power from a group that exceeds \$20,000,000 in annual sales, provides access to an existing network of more than 1,200 potential customers, and has huge advantages for employee group insurance and benefits programs.

Speaking for the owners, Jaime Maliszewski said he has no doubt that the new finishing company will succeed. "It's not your run-of-the-mill finishing," he said. "It's very high quality, and there's a demand for it. Elite Finishing is available to meet that demand." **PS&F**

Editor's Note: For more on Federal Brownfields Partnerships, visit www.epa.gov or ask your state or local environmental agencies.