

Commitment Keeps Pennsylvania Plater Adapting to Better Serve Customers

When Electro-Platers of York, Inc., celebrated its 50th anniversary on May 3, David R. (Dave) Sollenberger, CEF, president, gave a detailed account of the company's growth. It was started as a four-person jobshop and has grown to a facility that employs 60 full-time people, and has become one of the premier plating jobshops in the region.

A crowd made up of state and local officials, vendors, town folks and employees heard Sollenberger trace the company's history and accomplishments. It was apparent during the ceremonies that Electro-Platers of York has adapted to a changing industry through the years by going beyond what is required to meet growing regulations, and by staying committed to meeting the changing needs of its customers.

Background

Electro-Platers of York was originally incorporated in Hellam, PA, in May 1952. Following a series of ownership changes, Jay A. Sollenberger became a part owner in 1955, and became sole owner in 1962.

Jay's son, Dave, joined the company in 1969, and he became part owner in 1984. Following the death of his father in 1987, Dave and John Lehman became joint owners. Dave was named president in 1990, and became the sole owner in 1991, after John Lehman died unexpectedly.

Dave's mother, Nadine, served as president from 1987 until 1990, and still remains active in the company.



Dave Sollenberger, CEF, (left), president of Electro-Platers of York, Inc., welcomed AESF 1st Vice President Tim Baublitz to the shop's 50-year anniversary celebration. Baublitz has enjoyed a long professional relationship with the Sollenberger family and their jobshop.

Adapting to Customer Needs

In 1953, the shop was moved from Hellam to York, PA. An automatic rack zinc plating line was installed in 1959.

In 1962, Jay Sollenberger signed a lease/purchase agreement on the Wrightsville property where the jobshop is now located. Clean up and repair of the property was completed on weekends, mostly by the Sollenberger family.



Employees at Electro-Platers of York, Inc., posed for this group photo at the 50 year anniversary celebration.

The company was moved to Wrightsville, PA, in 1967. Before the shop was moved, a complete batch-type wastewater treatment facility was installed, which still meets today's wastewater treatment standards.

Increased demand for barrel plating prompted the company to install a computerized barrel line in 1967.

In 1977–78, the shop completed a major expansion that consisted of adding a semi-automatic hoist phosphating line, and a semi-automatic hoist operated rack zinc line, along with building a new warehouse and loading dock facilities.

An automatic return-type rack plater was installed in 1980 to process nickel-chrome, nickel-brass, and nickel. A barrel nickel line was added in 1983 to plate copper, nickel, and brass.

Another major expansion came in 1987–88 that included the installation of a fully automatic rack plater for processing chloride zinc. Further expansion in 1990 included a black oxide line, along with increasing production capabilities.

A barrel nickel-copper line was expanded in 1994, and tin was added to the line. That same year, the company completed installation of equipment and duct work for air scrubbers on the plating lines.

In 1995, a semi-automatic zinc phosphate line, including a cleaning and pickling line, was added.

Besides black oxide, other specialty processes offered include silver matte, silver immersion, alodine-chromate on aluminum, and zinc plating with dye color coding.

The plating operation is extensive and diverse, giving the company the capability of offering just about any plating option in functional and decorative deposits. A lot of the work completed in the shop is for components, such as hinges and hardware. About 20 percent of the business is for the automotive industry.

Owner Commitment

Before Jay Sollenberger joined Electro-Platers of York, he loved nature and was committed to protecting the environment. That's one of the reasons he installed a wastewater treatment system in 1967 that could handle treating much more waste than the company really produced.

Dave recalls that his father, who served on the national board of directors of AESF, farmed a 120-acre organic farm at the same time he was running the plating business.



Dyeing is one of the specialty processes offered. This photo shows some examples of the colors available.



Electro-Platers of York, Inc., is a high-volume jobshop that offers both rack (above) and barrel plating.

“He practiced all natural forms of vegetable production,” Dave said. “He used natural forms of insect control, such as preying insects and birds, and he even kept bees for pollination. He was an environmentalist before he ever went into plating.”

A committed family man, Jay Sollenberger spent many hours on the farm with his children and grandchildren. “He taught all his grandchildren to operate his Allis Chalmers Grasshopper tractor,” Dave said.

Dave also spends a lot of time with his own six grandchildren. He has a different compassion, however. Fishing is the one sport that claims much of his leisure time. His office wall is decorated with trophy fish that he has landed on one of his many fishing trips.

One of the most interesting mountings on his wall is a northern pike that he caught on a trip to Canada. The fish was too big to keep and had to be put back into the river. So, Dave took some pictures and vital measurements of the fish. When he returned home he had a taxidermist build a replica to mount on the wall. It looks real.

Long active in the Mid-Atlantic Regional Conference, Dave has attended AESF SUR/FIN® every year since 1988, with the exception of one.

In the local Branch, Dave worked through the chairs and served as president of the Susquehanna Valley Branch. He still serves as advertising and promotion chairman and puts together the Branch's popular AESF calendar each year.



Chemical storage is efficient with proper labeling. The storage areas are also kept clean to provide easy access.

Environmental Accomplishments

Electro-Platers of York signed on with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Strategic Goals Program (SGP) as a charter member. A high-volume zinc, nickel and nickel-chrome plating shop, it has met its goal of 50 percent reduction in water use.

In 1986, the company ran one shift on 10 production lines and used 12.88 million gal of water. In 1999, it ran 24 hours a day on 14 production lines and used 8.6 million gal of water.

The shop used new spray rinsing technology, low-pressure air agitation in tanks, and flow restrictors to achieve the reduction.

A recent improvement was the addition of a refrigeration department that makes cold water to cool plating baths. Using this closed loop system, cooling water is not dumped to rinse tanks. Electric costs have increased some, but large savings are expected in the wastewater treatment end, reducing water going to treatment by 5,000 gal/day. The project cost was \$48,205, but Dave said the estimated payback is less than two years.

Currently, the shop uses only 1.75 gal of water for every dollar of plating production. That's significantly lower than the industry average.



This bake oven is used to prevent hydrogen embrittlement on some parts.

"We've been reducing the amount of water we use as much as possible whenever we can," Dave said. He points to figures showing an annual decrease in water use since 1998:

- 1998—2.9 gal per production dollar
- 1999—2.0 gal per production dollar
- 2000—1.971 gal per production dollar
- 2001—1.966 gal per production dollar
- 2002—1.75 gal per production dollar

Because of these accomplishments, Electro-Platers of York has received recognition on a local, state and federal level. The company is a recipient of the 2001 Governor's Award for Environmental Excellence in Pennsylvania, and has received a Certificate of Achievement from EPA for waste reduction. The shop sends its F006 waste to recycle for metal recovery.

The company is also near completion of requirements to become ISO 9000 certified. It is also well on the way to achieving the ISO 14000 environmental management certification.



This photo shows some unfinished and finished parts typical of the components processed at Electro-Platers of York, Inc.

Celebrating Success

The 50-year anniversary was a celebration of the success and accomplishments of Electro-Platers of York, but it was also a celebration of the shop's future. The management and employees of the jobshop have a proven track record of doing things the right way in a business that has not always enjoyed the best reputation for environmental stewardship. Making an extra effort to protect the environment, and adapting to a changing industry will keep the jobshop in business for a long time. *P&SF*