

# Pleiger Plastics: Maintaining Niche Markets

BY EARL BUGAILE

for the Washington County Chamber of Commerce

When veterinarians at the University of Pennsylvania needed a specialized plastic shoe while treating Kentucky Derby winner Barbaro, they called on Pleiger Plastics of Washington, to develop the shoe and a casing that was used in his therapy.

When manufacturers of NASCAR autos need specific parts, such as bumpers, Pleiger provides the product. The same is true for manufacturers of prosthetic devices, industrial products and even things such as snow plow blades, squeegees and just about any kind of plastic part that is needed. Pleiger Plastics can manufacture it and deliver it in any quantity from a single unit to items by the thousands. They have been providing services on a worldwide basis to hundreds of customers for more than 20 years from their plant located in Washington.

"We service about 28 different industries," said Michael Savage, president of Pleiger Plastics. "We make artificial body parts. We make parts for pumps, jackhammers, nail-guns and automobiles, to name a few. We have customers in mining and steelmaking. We make different parts for all of them. Some customers might buy rollers, and other people might buy bumpers. Others may buy sheets of urethane to cut parts out of it. We



Pleiger Plastics president Michael Savage with one of the many products produced at the Washington plant.



Pleiger Plastics president Michael Savage on the production floor of the company.

have a pretty diverse product mix."

One of those customers was the veterinary team that worked to save the life of Barbaro. "They asked us if we could make (a special shoe) because they wanted to try it. We developed a custom horse shoe to their specification," Savage said.

Founded in 1986, the Pleiger Plastics plant on Crile Road is the only Pleiger facility in the United States. The German-based, family-owned company also has facilities in Germany, Korea and China. Over 40 people are employed at the Washington plant, and over 500 are employed by Pleiger worldwide. Many of the employees in Washington have been with the company from its beginnings.

Savage himself joined Pleiger upon graduation from college, and after working as a mechanical engineer for two other firms, returned to Pleiger in 1993, and became president five years ago. He is the centerpiece in a company where longevity of employees is the rule rather than the exception. "We still have many of our original employees, and others with over 15 years of service to the company, and several with over 20 years," Savage said. "We've been able to put together a good benefits package for our staff."

Although the US operations of Pleiger are centered in Washington, the scope of its customers are in all parts of the world. "We have customers in Iceland, Australia, Central America, Mexico, Europe, Russia, China, Korea and Japan," Savage

said. "We even have customers in India. Some of our customers are in locations where they are typically not importing. We do our part in the Trade Balance," he added.

Even though customers come from a wide variety of locations, Pleiger's size and approach to business has allowed employees to be vital in the operations, and to come to know the customers' needs and expectations.

"Everybody knows of our goals and our end game," Savage said. "If you ask some of the people in production, they have met the purchasing agents for the companies that we're dealing with. It creates a very good sense of pride in workmanship. Our customers get the product, and they know who made it. It creates a very good sense of pride in workmanship."

Savage said the feeling of teamwork is transcendent throughout the Washington operation because of the staff's pride in their work. "Many of our workers came from the glass industry, and they understand what happened there," Savage said. "I can walk down to the production floor, and I know them and they know me. They don't hesitate to come and ask me a question. Because it's a small company, I can still keep involved in the engineering and mechanics."

Over the past 22 years, Pleiger has grown and expanded. "This was an old ceramics factory, Savage said. "We basically gutted the building for our specifications, and we have added on." The offices were expanded in 1992, an addition doubled the size of the production area in 1997, and another

building was added in 2002. "We're pretty much tapped out as far as where we can expand, and would have to look for more space if we expand again in the future.

The demand for the specialty plastic products produced at Pleiger Plastics continues to grow. Polyurethane by its very nature can be made as soft as chewing gum or as hard as wood, as described by Savage, and the trend in the world-wide market place is perfect for a company like Pleiger Plastics.

"There's that niche market where someone has a specific need, Pleiger said. "A guy making a NASCAR racecar isn't going to be concerned as much about price, but rather that it works. We not only try to compete on price, but we try to compete on the quality of our product and service."

As part of the Washington community, Pleiger Plastics has not only endeavored to be a good employer, but to also be a good neighbor by being involved. "being part of the community is very important to us," Savage said. "We sponsor 'The Whiskey Rebellion' in Canonsburg. We sponsor 4-H programs at the County Fair, and buy pigs from kids at the West Alexander Fair. We remain active with the Washington Arts Center. It's important to be part of the community, and it's the Pleiger family philosophy to remain active in our communities."

The same is also true with involvement with the Washington County Chamber of Commerce. "We are committed to Washington," Savage said. "If we ever need to move or expand again, the first people we would call is the Washington County Chamber of Commerce or the county redevelopment authority to find out what is available, and what kind of assistance is out there for expansion and growth."

For the future, Savage looks for continued growth as more customers become aware of the products made at Pleiger Plastics, and the quality and pride with which they are made. "In 5 years I'd like to see us grow another 50 percent," he said. "We'll be pushing the World Markets as well as the Domestic Markets. There's still a lot of business to be had domestically.

You can learn more about Pleiger Plastics products by visiting their web page at [www.pleiger.com](http://www.pleiger.com) or you can contact Michael Savage by telephone at 724.228.2244.