By Gloria Taylor

In an old Dustin Hoffman film from 1967, a businessman can be heard suggesting to the indecisive young Hoffman that he should consider a future in “plastics.”

Decades later, it is the future of composite products that has Structural Composite Technologies Ltd. of Winnipeg celebrating its 50th anniversary in style.

The company is riding a wave of growth and expansion that is bound to continue given the growing presence of strong, lightweight fibreglass in a range of products and industries. Add to that skilled and loyal staff; ultra modern energy-efficient premises; a name change that more closely reflects its mission, and expanding markets and product lines, and President and Owner John Zadro has a lot to celebrate on this important anniversary.

One of Canada’s top fibreglass fabricators, Structural Composite Technologies makes a range of composite products in its state-of-the-art, 55,000-square-foot plant on the east side of Winnipeg. Industrial products, bathware, well casing and utility products are the main categories in today’s product line, but heading into its next decade of service, the company is making plans to add a line of OEM (original equipment manufacturing) parts using closed moulded technology.

Most of the products are marketed in Canada through distributors, but Structural has just received market certification in the United States and will soon be sending its well casing...
Connect.

With superior service and technical support.
With the world’s leading composites suppliers.
With a breadth of product options.
Your best connection to the products, processes and technology you need to grow your business ...
south of the border in addition to the Canadian drilling companies it supplies.

“This will be the year when we move our well casing down south,” says Zadro.

Utility products on the other hand are sold directly to power utilities across Canada. The company services multiple sectors: mining, chemical, wind energy, transportation, utilities and construction industries.
1983 Structural changes ownership hands for a third time to David Killam.

1984 Begins manufacturing Venco bathware line.

1992 Current president, John Zadro, joins Structural Glass as a Structural Engineer.

1995 John Zadro buys shares from other owners to become majority owner.

1999 John Zadro becomes sole owner of Structural Glass Ltd.

2001 Sells off septic tank line and acquires the Echo line of bathware.

2002 Purchases a winder, starts manufacturing well casing.

2008 Company moves to Hoka Street into facility three times the size of former plant, changes name to Structural Composite Technologies Ltd.

Congratulations on 50 Years
Structural Composite Technologies, Ltd.
The company’s involvement with clients however starts well before the shop floor where workers apply the resin and glass to shapes created over moulds. The company can engineer a particular product or design an entire industrial system, (thanks to two full-time engineers and other technical staff), which it can co-ordinate and manufacture. It also provides consulting, assembly, installation, on-site and in-house repair and service, and training and inspection. Structural has also developed a strategic alliance with the Composite Innovation Centre (CIC) of Winnipeg for detailed engineering analysis on a number of large industrial stacks, scrubbers and other products in an effort to optimize material placement and final product weight.

With large volume niche markets and a solid foothold in the composites industry that can only continue to grow as fibreglass products gain acceptance, Structural Composite Technologies Ltd. is well positioned to take advantage of the opportunities as they unfold over the next decade.

There’s one tried and true formula that it won’t change: “We design products for value and engineer them to last,” says Zadro, adding that customers have come to rely on Structural Composite Technologies’ quality work.

“Structural has made a name for itself by never giving an inferior product; our products are going to stand up, and our customers know it.” Nevertheless, the bottom line is also a consideration. “We also have to make sure we design it for value, because customers need competitive pricing for a product,” adds Zadro.

“The team decided that in order to grow, we needed to do it through acquisition, expansion or a move.”

—President and Owner John Zadro
The early days

The company was founded in 1961 under the name Structural Glass Ltd. The first plant was located on Henry Avenue in downtown Winnipeg and the employees made septic tanks.

In 1964, the fabricator also began doing some industrial work for INCO, a nickel mining giant based in Thompson, Manitoba. “INCO was the flagship customer for the industrial line that continued to increase from that time on,” says Zadro. “That growth pushed us out of the Henry facility, then in 1966, we moved to Burnett Avenue.”

In 1972, Monarch Industries bought Structural Glass, a significant development that also grew the product line. “During the Monarch days, the company grew the septic tank market and minimized the industrial work, then added Leocraft camper trailers.
and Delta Craft boats. Most of the manufacturing was being done in Winnipeg, while campers were being made in Gimli (Manitoba),” says Zadro, who joined the company almost two decades later – in 1992 – when he bought shares in the company.

The camper trailers didn’t last long however, and in 1983, the company changed ownership for a third time and divested itself of the camper and boat lines and focused on growing its industrial work. That didn’t stop the product line from expanding though. “In 1985, the company began doing its bathware line under the names of Venco, later adding the Echo line in 2011,” adds the president. Transformer pads were also added, which the company marketed directly to power utilities throughout Canada.

Because markets were changing and the market for fiberglass septic tanks was reduced due to competing products and reduced demand, Structural sold its septic tanks business in 2001, but in 2002, it added to its product line once again by manufacturing well casing.

In 1995, a major milestone occurred for Zadro, which also defined the company for years to come. He bought enough shares from his two partners to gain a controlling 51 per cent interest in the company. He welcomed the opportunity to become the president, but he was also cognizant of the responsibility he had taken on.

“The bank was my responsibility; the operating line was my responsibility; the bottom line and the top line were my concern. I was reporting information that I was not used to reporting before, so I went from being an engineer to being a businessman,” Zadro recalls. “Now, it was my team. I wasn’t relying on shareholders anymore. I was relying on my team for direction, and I had a great group of people with me.” Failure was not an option, he adds. By this time, the company had significantly added to its product line so that it needed new digs. In June of 2008, Zadro moved his company to a spacious 55,000-square-foot building on Hoka Street where it remains today but not before extensively renovating the building.

“We tripled in size and capacity and made a name change from Structural Glass to Structural Composite Technologies,” he says. “We were having an image problem,” he explains, referring to the name change.

“It was perceived that we were a plate glass company, but our business is composites. We are not restricted to one industry or one niche market, so we wanted a name that better reflected what we do,” he says. “The common thread that ties it all together is that we manufacture composite products.”

**Defining moment**

Whether you call them meetings or strategy sessions, every 50-year-old business has discussions that define the future of the company. In 2007, an important retreat was held in Kenora, Ontario that set the groundwork for major changes.

“The team decided that in order to grow, we needed to do it through acquisition, expansion or a move,” comments the president. That internal look sparked the move to the new premises on Hoka Street, but not before Structural undertook significant major renovations that turned the new plant into a state-of-the-art green fiberglass shop.

It would require a large investment by the company, but Zadro was confident in the future of the business and the fiberglass industry.

“We supply the industrial sector and its needs, and they were starting to use more fiberglass products. Fibreglass was becoming more mainstream.” That’s not to say that everyone was prepared to replace their steel, wood or concrete products with fiberglass alternatives, but Zadro, who is well aware of the industry’s fiberglass research and what products companies were using, could see growth, and he was optimistic.

The analysis was bang on, and business grew.

“Since 2008 when we moved into the new facility, our industrial arm has grown four-fold, and that’s just been in three years.” At first, business increased modestly, because of the global recession that hit companies around the globe, but...
Zadro considered any growth under those trying economic conditions to be an achievement.

“The only commitment I wanted from my team is that we weren’t going to slip back,” he remarks.

Staff delivered on that commitment, and business has increased steadily over the past few years. All in all, under Zadro’s leadership since 1992, sales have increased by more than eight times. “Some years have been dramatically bigger than others, but we continued to grow,” he points out.

Going green
John Zadro calls it “going the extra green mile.” While it was necessary to renovate the Hoka Street building for compliance to worker safety standards, the president decided not only to meet code requirements for the safety of workers in the building, but he committed to working with Manitoba Hydro to retrofit the building to top green building standards for manufacturing.

Manitoba Hydro Power Smart programs identified energy saving opportunities and advised the company on best equipment choices for energy efficient lighting, compressed air and heat recovery ventilation systems. It also provided a grant to help finance the sweeping renovations.

Frees (USA) worked closely with Structural to design and install a state-of-the-art heat recovery ventilation system that captures the discharged shop air and recovers 73 per cent of the discharged heat back into the fresh air supply. “This alone has reduced our gas consumption to less than one-third of what it would have been without the heat recovery system in place,” says Zadro. “This, coupled with a fully computer controlled ventilation system allows Structural to strategically move large volumes of fresh air when required and where required. This keeps work areas to levels well within regulated guidelines, all while keeping energy costs to a minimum.”

Professional Affiliations
- Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters (CME)
- American Composite Manufacturers Association (ACMA)
- Composites Innovation Centre (CIC)
- The American Society of Mechanical Engineers RTP-1 (ASME)
- National Association of Corrosion Engineers (NACE)
- Winnipeg Construction Association
- Association of Professional Engineers & Geoscientists of the Province of Manitoba (APEGM)
- Professional Engineers Ontario (PEO)
- Association of Professional Engineers & Geoscientists of Saskatchewan (APEGS)
- Canadian Federation of Independent Business (CFIB)
- ISNetworld (ISN)
- National Sanitation Foundation (NSF)
- Canadian Standards Association (CSA)

Structural Composite Technologies’ product line:

**Industrial**
- Tanks
- Coolers
- Process equipment
- Pipes
- Ducting
- Scrubbers
- Electrolytic cells
- Fans
- Blowers
- Electrical components
- Architectural structures
- Grating

**Bathware**
Tubs and showers under the manufacturers’ names of Venco and Echo sold through distributors

**Well casing**
A large diameter pipe that lines and protects the integrity of a well

**Utility Products**
FRP products sold directly to power companies across Canada
The result?
“Upgrades have resulted in energy savings in excess of $100,000 per year while providing superior space temperature control, which has led to worker comfort and improved production processes,” comments Zadro. Significantly, payback time is expected to be less than four years.

“We also have a gas bill that is only slightly higher than our former plant which was one-third the size of our current plant,” says the president.

“We can proudly lay claim to having the best energy conservation system in the composite industry throughout North America,” he adds. “These initiatives have allowed us to minimize our footprint on the environment. It has also helped us to better control our production processes and create a healthier, more comfortable working environment, and that’s good for business.”

Brian Zadro, industrial marketing manager, said work comes to the company in a variety of ways. “Some business is repeat business like our bathware line, but the custom design part is very important,” he points out. This is particularly true in the composites industry where many of the large tanks, covers and stacks are unique, designed specifically for the job they are required to do.

Brian Zadro, who joined Structural in 1995, said the company already has a track record with some of the clients, which can offer certain advantages.

“Some companies have faith in us, and will get us to do a design for them, then quote on the job. That doesn’t guarantee that Structural will get the job, but there is no question that it gives you an advantage. The companies will recognize that you helped them with that.”

As in other business sectors, professional relationships are highly important and may be key to winning some work.

“The limitation is your imagination because we’re very creative when it comes to designing and building. We can find some efficiency in design that a lot of people can’t.” The sales manager is very confident with the company’s design capabilities. As for the future, ask the president what’s in store for the company, and he says Structural Composite Technologies is well positioned to take advantage of continued growth because
of industries' increasing use of strong and lightweight fibreglass products.

“There will continue to be growth opportunities coming up in the future, and even I don't know where they are going to come from,” he says. “It's kind of like the field of dreams. You build it and they will come.”

Quite simply, Zadro believes in the exceptional properties of fibreglass.

“I refer to the strength to weight ratio. If you can have a plate that weighs a fraction of steel and you can form that composite to whatever curvature you want, it’s valuable. You can’t wrap steel around a mould with the same curvature and flexibility as fibreglass. And now, you’ve got a product that weighs a fraction of a similar steel product. And, as a result, the item can provide light weight installation, non-corrosive, better fuel economy and increase your load carrying weight – whether it’s a car, bus, plane or a bridge. That’s where composites consistently have the appeal.”

The president is also a strong supporter of people: namely his staff, whom he gives high praise, and the greater community in which they work. There are some longtime workers he’s convinced are among the best in the composites industry.

“Structural has made a name for itself by always manufacturing well built quality products that meet or exceed their customer’s requirements. Our products are going to stand up and our customers know it. We owe a lot of that to our staff.”

Giving back to the community has always been important too, and Structural Composite Technologies Ltd. is pleased to support a number of worthy organizations through donations, products or labour. Habitat for Humanity, the engineering faculty at the University of Manitoba, the Misericordia Hospital Foundation and St. Paul's High School top the list.

As for Structural Composite Technologies, he is optimistic about the path the company has charted.

“We have our head above water and we have kept it out of the sand,” he sums up.

“The future is looking bright and to paraphrase Dustin Hoffman – we have considered our future in – ‘composites!’”

Don White, CFA, CGA
Executive Vice President
Winnipeg Investment Services
D: 204.926.3843
C: 204.227.8898
E: dwhite@colliers.mb.ca

MIKE’S FIBERGLASS REPAIR AND FABRICATION

- Specializes in Tub/Shower repairs – Gelcoat or Acrylic
- PVC window/door jambs and all around Fiberglass needs

288 Knowles Ave., Winnipeg, MB R2G 1E2
Phone: 204-663-5118 | Fax: 204-667-5651
Email: mikesfiberglass@mymts.net

Congratulations to our friends and business associates at Structural Composite Technologies Ltd. on your 50th Anniversary

G R A N I T E
Financial Group Inc.
Toll free: 1.866.943.0723
Website: www.granitefg.ca
Our product line includes:
tankage of all descriptions,
pipe, fittings, duct work, stacks,
scrubber systems, cooling
towers, process equipment,
covers, electrolytic cells,
fans, blowers, transformer
pads, vehicle components,
electrical components,
architectural structures,
shower stalls, and bathtubs.

Our services include:
consulting, engineering,
design, custom fabrication,
assembly, installation, on-site
and in-house repair & service,
training, and inspection.