

focus

august 2008

The monthly news magazine of the Lansing Regional Chamber of Commerce

I like to tell people that you don't know us but we touch your life every day.

Bekum America: Touching Your Life Every Day

Bekum America's manufacturing facility sits in an unassuming manner near the heart of downtown Williamston. The folks who work at Bekum seem to enjoy being a seemingly quiet success story you may not know about, but one that results in an array of products we all know and use.

"I like to tell people that you don't know us but we touch your life every day," said **Owen Johnston**, Bekum's Chief Financial Officer.

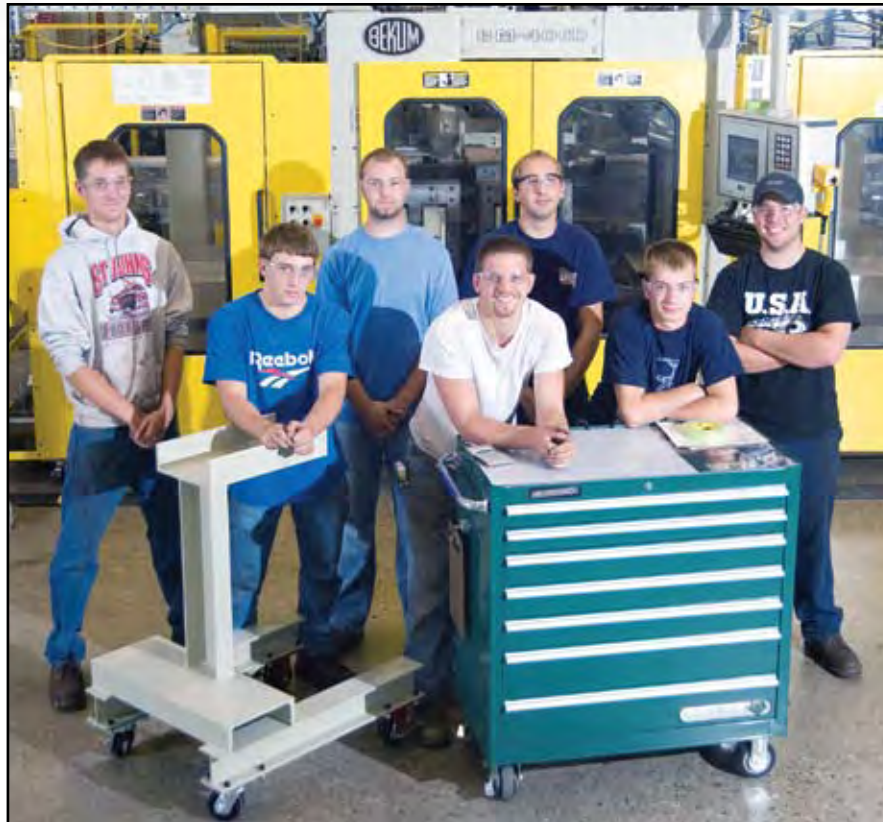
Bekum America was established in 1979 as the U.S. subsidiary of Bekum Maschinenfabriken GmbH, the world's leading provider of blow molding machines and technology. The company has designed, manufactured, sold and shipped thousands of blow molding machines and component parts to customers throughout North and Central America, Africa, Southeast Asia and the Caribbean.

The products that Bekum's customers manufacture with their blow molding machines are widely known brands of some of your favorite cosmetic and shampoo bottles, food jars, detergent bottles and containers, as well as countless other plastic parts.

"Our customers are supplying firms like Unilever, Proctor and Gamble, Colgate-Palmolive and many others," said **Steven London**, Bekum's Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer.

Bekum officials believe an important part of their success has been the ability to transfer innovations in blow molding technology that are often developed in Europe and adapt them to the United States, which gives Bekum an edge in both sales and service.

"We can provide support to the blow molding industry that is second to none," said Bekum President and Chief Executive Officer **Martin Stark**. "If a customer with a half million dollar machine calls at 1:00 in the morning, they get a call back by 1:15 and our technician is on the way."



Bekum's fully funded apprenticeship program ensures a quality workforce for the future. Front row (l-r) John Plesko, Justin Schmitt, Chris Martin; Back row (l-r) Zaben Thelen, Jake Klont, Tyrone Darling, and Steven Roberts

Bekum is unique in the blow molding industry for the support services it offers customers, potential customers and employees. Bekum's 115,000 square-foot facility includes a state-of-the-art learning center for ongoing training. Bekum has also set aside two blow molding machines to allow existing customers and inventors to test new ideas in a secure, confidential environment before products are released to the market.

The team at Bekum strongly believes their ongoing workforce development program is an integral part of the company's long-term success. Since starting a sophisticated European style apprentice training program in 1996, six local students have completed the program and are now

part of Bekum's 100-person work force. Seven apprentices are currently in the program. Bekum fully funds the costs of the apprentice program, so each graduate completes the training with no educational debt.

"We set the standard when it comes to the apprentice program," said Johnston. "It's a demanding process, but one that is well worth it to students who make the commitment to stick with it."

Bekum has worked with the Lansing Area Manufacturing Program (LAMP) and through local school districts to identify qualified apprentices. Each apprentice must complete 8,000 hours of training and study over four years, including maintaining a 3.0 average in related course work at Lansing Community College.

"We have supported the apprentice program to ensure that we continue to have a quality work force 5-10-15 years from now," said London. "We rely on them for the future of our company."

Although Bekum has established itself as a global powerhouse in the blow molding industry, the company prides itself on maintaining a family-like environment for its employees, several of whom have

worked for Bekum since the company opened in 1979. Bekum has heavily invested in the local community including providing scholarships for local students and donating state-of-the-art blow molding machines for college training programs.

Bekum's emphasis on quality in sales and customer service, as well as the company's focus on building and maintaining a highly skilled workforce seem to be a formula for long-term success.

Bekum America is not only a world-class manufacturer touching every day lives, its employees and customers will tell you it is a world-class company with a heart for every day people and the Lansing region.