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The future is ICR's priority

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One doesn't need to be an expert in industrial equipment to be able to tell there's a lot going on at Industrial Control Repair in Warren.

New employees are on the job. Free space is at a premium as the company prepares to move to larger quarters later this month. And the managers are figuring out the logistics for putting on a second shift for the first time in the company's 12-year history.

The company, which repairs electronic control panels for a variety of industrial users, is branching out in new ways, opening service centers in Mexico and Canada and aiming for as much as a 50 percent increase in revenues in 2005.

The business was started by Paul Gutierrez in 1992. In the beginning, the entire focus was on the repair of electronic circuit boards and control panels used in the local automotive industry. Slowly, the company branched out, adding the buying and selling of industrial electronic replacement parts, the repair of servo motors and the repair and sale of used robotic equipment.

"We had slow growth in the business in the beginning," said Don Czerniewski, who, along with Gutierrez and Glenn Dantes, is a partner in the business. "The approach for the first five or so years, was to get the equipment in place that we need to do the job right, get the people in place who know how to work on this type of equipment. To lay the foundation."

Around 2002, the company started taking off. That year, ICR posted \$10 million in revenue. That number grew to \$12 million in 2003 and will come in at around \$16 million in 2004. Czerniewski said the company is forecasting 2005 revenues of \$22-25 million.

With the growth in operations has come a need for employees.

When Ron Nester hired on with ICR in January as the company's first full-time human

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resources manager, he was employee number 90. The company will end 2004 with about 125 employees.

By the end of the month, ICR expects to move from the two buildings, about a block apart from each other, that it occupies in an industrial park along 10 Mile Road in Warren to a building near the Arsenal Industrial District in central Warren. With the move, ICR will go from 25,000 square feet in two buildings to 55,500 square feet in one.

"That's going to make us much more efficient," Czerniewski said. "Right now we have to operate two shipping and receiving departments, two stock rooms. We'll be able to consolidate all of that in the new building."

With new employees onboard and a forecast that more will be hired, ICR developed a training program to make sure its employees are up to speed on all of the latest technology. The company's efforts in that area recently earned ICR recognition from the Michigan Business & Professional Association, which named ICR one its 10 best companies to work for in the metropolitan Detroit region. ICR was singled out for its employee education and development program.

"The winners of the top 10 Elite Awards set very high standards in their human resources procedures" said Jennifer Kluge, executive vice president of the MBPA. "A company is only as good as its employees. The winners of the top 10 Elite Awards understand this, and have designed programs to train, motivate and retain valuable employees."

"Basically, we start out by determining where an employee is in terms of skills. Then we ask them what they aspire to in 1-3 years and in 5 or more years," Nester said. "Then we look at the different certification and licensing programs that are out there to plug people into."

"You can't automate brains, service and technical ability. You have to have good people for that," Gutierrez said.

Nester said the company is also making a priority in the future of hiring new hires from internships, co-op programs and other university and college programs.

Czerniewski said one of the challenges facing ICR and companies like it is that industrial electronic equipment is following a trend that has already taken hold of the residential electronics market. More and more, electronic gadgetry is becoming cheaper to replace than to repair.

"That's not true today in the industrial market, but we see that trend coming," Czerniewski said. "It's just like how nobody pays to have a TV repaired anymore. It's just cheaper to go buy a new one."

That's why ICR has been expanding its used equipment purchase and re-sale business in recent years. It also repairs some electric motors that are related to other parts it sells.

ICR is moving outside the southeast Michigan area to attract new business. In the last 90 days, it opened small satellites in Mexico and Canada, primarily because of shipping difficulties.

"Getting some of this equipment across the border is just too much of a headache," Czerniewski said.

ICR also recently signed a contract to manage all the electronic assets in three Honda plants in Ohio. And it is increasingly looking to add clients outside the automotive industry. It is working on projects for Federal Express and the U.S. Postal Service.

"We've worked to build our reputation," Czerniewski said. "Now we are standing and growing on that reputation."



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