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Owners of Plastek Werks Inc. use SBDC & SBA Programs To Grow their business in Cleveland, Georgia *--Two SBA 504 Development Loans help Expand the Plant--*

Gary Hopkins and his business partner Mark Kirves are not bashful about the help they and their employees have received from the Small Business Development Center in Gainesville.

“Our experience with the SBDC has allowed us to go from a tunnel vision view of our business to look at the bigger picture—not only where we would like to go—but what it will require to get there,” says Hopkins, President of Plastek Werks Inc., in Cleveland, Georgia.

Hopkins and Kirves, who is Secretary/Treasurer of the company, asked Ron Simmons, Gainesville SBDC Regional Director, to join them late last year for an all day Strategic Planning Session with the Plastek Werks executives and their management team. Simmons had originally helped the company put together a five-year action plan in 1996. “Looking back, we can see where the decisions we made with that plan really helped us grow,” noted Hopkins whose company, an industrial plastics fabricator, has seen sales grow by some 30 percent over the last three years.



From left, are owners Mark Kirves and Gary Hopkins

In addition, both Hopkins and Kirves are currently attending the SBDC’s six-week “Fast Trac” management course in Lawrenceville. Key staff at the company have also attended SBDC workshops on Inventory Control, Finance and Sales over the past few years.

Plastek Werks specializes in manufacturing products and providing consulting services where corrosive chemicals and other safety and environmental issues are concerned. Their product line includes plastic tanks and linings, concrete protective linings, containment systems and other plastic welding consultation and inspections.

With the public attention to environmental issues, the company has grown to include 14 employees including several certified thermoplastic welding technicians. In 2000, Hopkins and Kirves moved the company from Gainesville to its larger, Cleveland facility financed with a 504 Economic Development Loan. The first loan was financed by United Community Bank of Cleveland and Georgia Mountains Regional Economic Development Corporation, an SBA Certified Development Company (CDC) based in Gainesville.

Last spring, the same bank and CDC approved another 504 Loan of \$538,000 for the company to enlarge its plant/warehouse to 33,000 square feet. The bank provided 54 percent of the loan and the CDC provided 36 percent of the funds which were raised by SBA-backed debentures.

“The low down payment was a major attraction of our 504 loans,” said Hopkins. “The loans also offered the bank a lower risk since part of the financing came from the CDC.”

Hopkins and Kirves started a new subsidiary, “Stormwater Systems,” last year at their expanded plant facility. This unit offers products that help clean storm water and other surface water that can impact municipal, commercial and residential customers.

Hopkins said the new company is donating a system, licensed in Australia, to the City of Helen to collect floating debris from the nearby Chattahoochee River. This system is scheduled to be installed on the river in March, just below Helen.

The co-owners of Plastek Werks worked for Chevron Chemical Company’s Plastic Division in Atlanta and formed their own company shortly before Chevron closed the division. Hopkins is a native of Atlanta and attended the University of Georgia before joining Chevron. Kirves grew up in DeKalb and Gwinnett counties and attended several technical schools before he joined Chevron and its Chemical Division.

The co-owners said they chose the name “Plastek Werks” to reflect the company’s plastic welding technology that was developed primarily in Germany.

Hopkins is a resident of Lumpkin County and Kirves lives in nearby Hall County.

Gary Hopkins & Mark Kervis, Co-owners

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