

## GeorgeKo Industries: Meeting the Needs of the Plastics Industry

When the Great Recession hit, from December 2007 to June 2009, some local industries were hit pretty hard. Sadly, some of those businesses didn't survive. Not only did Erie's GeorgeKo Industries survive, but it also got stronger. Meet the shop whose flexibility saw it through a tough economic period--and which allows it to flourish today.



"Sixty percent of our business is short runs, often 1,000 pieces or less," said Matt Koket, President of GeorgeKo Industries. "We may do three to five machine changes or set ups a day," he added. This is one of the company's keys to success:

"Offering small production runs, which most companies shy away from, is how we have been successful. It has allowed GeorgeKo to grow by over 100 percent in the last five years and attract over 50 new customers in the last 15 years," Koket said.

GeorgeKo Industries was started in 1983 by Matt's father, George Koket. Today, Matt is the company's president. His two siblings, Mike and Alicia, help him run the family business.

The reshoring of tools from other countries has been one of the ways that GeorgeKo has grown. The current administration, however, has placed a 10-percent tariff on plastic products coming from China, and has implemented up to a 25-percent tariff on steel tooling from China over the past six months, according to Koket.

Koket is also playing a role as a mentor, too, aiding others to design products. "I have about 8-10 entrepreneurs I'm currently helping," Koket said. One of those companies is Robinson Pharma, based in Santa Ana, California, which specializes in nutritional supplements. Koket said he has spent the last two years helping develop a new mixing bottle for powdered supplement drinks, which should be on the market in the next two months.

The design Koket has produced for Robinson Pharma has resulted in a plastic cup that both holds a protein-powder drink as well as mixes it. There is a spiral-shaped plastic piece in the middle of the cup, which mixes the drink. It is turned by the cap on top of the plastic cup.

Koket has also helped produce an ergonomic paint roller in conjunction with a Pittsburgh-area inventor. The E-Roller is designed to take the stress off the wrist during painting. It can be seen and purchased on the website, [www.eroller.com](http://www.eroller.com).

GeorgeKo Industries has tools which produce infant bath tubs, lamps for automotive, and molded corner caps for box trucks, just to name a few items people might recognize. However, their staple products are parts for ice machines for Follett, a company based in Easton, Pennsylvania.

“These Follett ice machines produce chewblet ice, which is used in hospitals. It’s composed of compressed chewable ice,” Koket said. According to Follett’s website, the ice is porous, allowing the flavor of the drink to be absorbed. This leaves a “crunchy treat when the drink is gone.”

Another popular consumer item that GeorgeKo produces is a flower pot. That, combined with the flint wheels used by Zippo lighters, are some of their best-selling products. “Zippo uses 14 million of these per year,” Koket said.

As most companies do, GeorgeKo is looking to the future. However, growing the company beyond its 38 employees won’t be easy, according to Koket. “I hire some retired people on a part-time basis, because it’s hard to find enough qualified workers,” Koket said.



One of the things Koket is championing--in part because of the lack of workers--is an apprenticeship program in the plastics industry. According to Shawn DeLong, apprenticeship coordinator for the Keystone Community Education Council, GeorgeKo Industries is one of the inaugural companies utilizing the state-registered Plastics Process Technician Apprenticeship Program.

Lance Hummer, executive director of KCEC, said the idea for an apprenticeship program in the plastics industry came out of a conference about the petrochemical industry. He was told by state officials they would like KCEC to facilitate the apprenticeship program. The classroom section of the Plastics Process Technician program is currently being taught at AIM, the American Injection Molding Institute, in Erie.

So what does Koket attribute to GeorgeKo Industries’ success? “I think establishing a family atmosphere is very important,” Koket said. “We even have a retiree who lives in Florida, but he comes back here two months every summer to help out,” he added.

With Koket’s willingness to help novice designers and the family atmosphere his company has established, GeorgeKo Industries is poised to be successful for many years to come.