

Carrying on Dad's dream

By Sara Rae Lancaster

In crisis situations, people often call family first. That's what brought sisters Sheri Jorgenson and Jill Osiecki to work at Plastic Parts Inc., a custom plastic injection molding company in Union Grove founded by their father, Arthur Jorgenson Jr., in 1966.

"It was Dad's lifelong dream to work in plastics," said Osiecki, company vice president. "He loved chemistry, and his father was an inventor and tool maker."

The sisters grew up watching their father expand the company from a humble factory in Racine to the sprawling 45,000-square-foot facility it occupies today. In high school and college, Jorgenson, now the company's president, worked second shift as a press operator. But their father knew Plastic Parts was his dream, and he never pressured any of his four children to follow in his footsteps.

"Dad never insisted we work here," Jorgenson said, adding they were encouraged to find and follow their own paths.

But in 1987 Jorgenson was laid off from her job. She remembers calling her parents to tell them the news. As luck would have it, an employee quit a week earlier. With her knowledge of the company and background in business, engineering and technology, Jorgenson joined the payroll.

Almost 20 years later, and also between jobs, Osiecki assumed a position at the family business when the company discovered a key employee embezzled money.

"When something like that happens, you don't know who to trust," said Jorgenson, who holds a business degree from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, with a minor in engineering and an associate degree in computer technology.

Initially, Osiecki's father asked if she would work for him temporarily to make sure the bills were paid and invoices sent to customers.

"I wasn't planning on staying," said Osiecki, who had spent the previous 25 years in pharmaceutical sales. "But I found my business and sales experiences helped. Eight years later I'm still here."

Osiecki, whose career up to that point had been with large corporations, said working for a small, family business was a breath of fresh air.

"We get to make decisions we think are right. It's not political or wrapped up in who's your buddy," she said. "It's been a lot more rewarding."

Take the company's latest venture, Artistry of Plastics, for example. Using a patent-pending, proprietary technique called Fabric Fusion, Artistry of Plastics creates unique and stylish plastic products and packaging by fusing plastic resins with fabric.

Osiecki, who holds a master's degree of management from the Kellogg Graduate School at Northwestern University and a bachelor's degree in chemistry and biology, is president of Artistry of Plastics.

The idea emerged when Dallas-based designer Kathleen Quinn, president of K. Quinn designs, approached Plastic Parts about creating a fashionable, high-end container for baby wipes. Earlier prototypes that used decals failed to give the case the desired upscale look.

"I suggested we use fabric," Osiecki said. "Everyone else thought it wouldn't work, but I figured it was our machine and our time, so why not try. And what do you know, it worked."

Osiecki took the successful prototype to her dad, now blind. She ran his hand over the top of the case.

"And he said to me, 'You're on the ball, kid.' I'm a pretty old kid, but that's probably the best accolade I could get from my father," Osiecki said.

Today, Artistry of Plastics, a name that gives a subtle nod to dad "Art" as well as the division's artistic qualities, is redefining custom plastic injection molding, an opportunity Osiecki and Jorgenson doubt they would have had outside the family business setting.

"I can't think of any publicly held company that would've permitted me to do the amount of work necessary for me to get this to work," Osiecki said. "They probably would've told the customer it couldn't be done."

But as much as either sister may like an idea, neither will act on something if it fails to meet one very important criteria: Is it in the best interest of the company?

"This company is bigger than any one of us," Jorgenson said. "We each may want our own way, but that may not be the best way for the company."

Any differences in opinions usually get settled by asking that one question, said Osiecki, "because it wasn't our personal goal to be here. We're here because we're committed to the goal and dream Dad had. And I think Dad would be proud." ♀



PHOTOGRAPH BY BILL SIEL
Jill Osiecki, left, is vice president and Sheri Jorgenson is president of Plastic Parts Inc., a Union Grove custom plastic injection molding company.