

# Growing with the flow

Diversity of retail market accelerates store fixture manufacturer's growth

By Brooke Baldwin Wisdom



## THE RETAIL MARKET HAS BEEN STRONG

for Madsen Fixture and Millwork in Forest Lake, MN, since its start in January of 1998. Beginning with a crew of only six, 62 employees now manufacture production store fixture runs as well as custom projects in its 60,000-sq.-ft. facility. "Our biggest challenge has always been helping our production capabilities keep pace with sales," says Jeff Trippe, CEO and owner. "The work keeps flowing in so we just try to grow with the flow. The retail market has offered us a lot of diversity, and we're very happy with the way things are going."

In fact, things are going so well that Trippe reports that except for six to eight weeks of the year, production runs on over-

time. Yet, he's not complacent about his success. "We're pleased with the diversity we now have, but we continue to work on getting into other areas," he notes. "We mainly manufacture retail store fixtures, but we're trying to diversify into other markets in case of a slowdown in retail. Retail has been very good to us. Our customers' referrals have been the greatest compliments we could ask for. We have grown a great reputation here, and people know it all the way around whether they're coming to work here or have their project built here."

Whether doing national roll-outs or custom work, Madsen's process is the same. The company submits its bid off of architectural drawings. Once it is awarded the job, shop drawings are sent to the customer for approval. "We do some design on the shop drawings, but mainly it's an 'engineering' job for us" says Trippe. "We design only to make it more cost effective without sacrificing what the client wants. Once the drawings are approved, our project managers order the materials, and our superintendent distributes the work to the lead men. Each lead man has his own crew and his job is to work with the foreman to make sure he gets all his materials and parts cut before his date to

assemble. The foreman and lead men working together makes sure it gets through all of our processing in a timely manner."

## Tax breaks spur on equipment updates

In the last few years Madsen has taken advantage of what Trippe calls "the great tax breaks" to upgrade all of its equipment. Its updated equipment arsenal includes two Weeke Optimat BHC 550 machining centers, a Holzma Optimat HPP72 panel saw and a Homag Optimat KAL310 edgebander all from Stiles Machinery. Its most recent purchase is a new Kentwood M609X six-head moulder, also from Stiles Machinery. "The latest, greatest equipment just makes us more efficient," says Trippe. "If you don't keep upgrading your equipment, you're going to fall by the wayside. It's really been helpful, especially in the custom end of things. I always thought the machines would be the most helpful in the production runs and, of course, they are great. In addition, they are very beneficial for the custom pieces because we're not routing circles and arcs by hand anymore. We program it and we run it. Madsen's programmers are able to draw from their experience with other jobs they have done over the years and can take a part off one program and apply it to another one. This is just one of the many ways we've developed to increase our efficiency."