

SOMETHING NEW



ROOM TO GROW: Jim Van, founder and partner of SproutRI, which is a co-working space for freelancers, independent workers and entrepreneurs, is seen in some of the office space at Rising Sun Mills in Providence.

PBN PHOTO/MICHAEL SALERNO

Co-working space rises in city

BY PATRICIA DADDONA | Daddona@PBN.com

THE THREE PARTNERS OF SproutRI are all customers, as well as owners, of the co-working space they've set up at the Rising Sun Mills campus at 166 Valley St. in Providence.

Jim Van, founder, of Providence, and fellow partners John Kevorkian, of East Greenwich, and Zachary Weinburger, of Providence, formed the limited liability company in September, held a soft opening in early December and opened officially for business on Jan. 4 with 20 additional clients.

The cooperative mix of offices and meeting space, supplemented with a conference room that can seat 21, has the capacity to serve 100 clients, with some taking up dedicated, full-time residency. Others use "hot-desk" services on a daily and monthly part-time basis.

"We're developing a community here," said Van, who has launched six smaller co-working centers in Greater Toronto through his private, Providence-based information technology firm, Logicomm. ■

SPOTLIGHT



PERFECTING PERFORATING: Peter Fahlman is president of Ferguson Perforating, a company that perforates metal to make everything from lining for the glass door of a microwave oven, to filters for the sugar industry and centrifuges for the spinning cylinder in a washing machine. In the background, from left, are employees Wayne Rose, press operator, and David Silva, material handler.

PBN PHOTO/MICHAEL SALERNO

No holes in quality control

Parts supplier meets specs BY PATRICIA DADDONA | Daddona@PBN.com

EVER NOTICE THE PERFORATED metal lining the glass door of your microwave oven? That's just one of the common parts for products **Ferguson Perforating** of Providence manufactures.

Keeping a low profile and doing business with clients mostly outside of Rhode Island, CEO Bruce Ferguson and President Peter Fahlman oversee the global, family-owned company, which employs 125 people in Providence and New Castle, Pa.

That perforated metal element shields the user by blocking radio-magnetic frequencies, they said. "We manufacture parts to customer specifications," said Fahlman. "[Clients] do the assembly. We put the holes in the metal for them exactly the way they want."

Precision and stringent quality control are the company's focus. The firm supplies parts for everything from metal filters for the sugar industry, to centrifuges for the spinning cylinder in a washing machine, Ferguson and Fahlman said.

Very small holes may be punctured in metal for filtering, shielding, separating solids from liquids, or even controlling sound in the engine enclosures of commercial jets.

Pressing as many as 400,000 holes a minute requires careful pre-planning to exact specifications, they said.

"We never know quite what we're going to make," quipped Ferguson.

In fact, on its website, the company invites potential clients to "challenge us" to try something new. Its employees represent its most invaluable asset as a result: its human capital, know-how and institutional knowledge, the two men said.

"Most of them live here," Fahlman noted. "They are your assets."

The company, which does not disclose annual revenue, has in addition to a wide portfolio of diverse clientele, which it also does not disclose, occasional major, one-time jobs. For instance, around the time of the Gulf

War, the federal government sought a large quantity of steel blast deflectors for Humvees. Another government contract involved producing plates for dams in the Northwest to prevent fish from getting stuck in turbines.

J. Cecil Ferguson founded the company in 1927 as the J.C. Ferguson Manufacturing Works, supplying centrifugal liners and other products to the sugar industry.

"We still do that now," Fahlman said.

In 1937, the company was reincorporated as the Ferguson Perforating and Wire Co. In 1965, Bruce Ferguson joined the company, and in 1972 became company president. When his father passed away in 1988, Bruce Ferguson assumed control. Seven years later, Ferguson Perforating expanded to New Castle, Pa., to serve its growing national clientele.

About 100 of the employees are in Providence, where the focus is administration, sales and engineering, with the remainder in New Castle.

Continued business growth here in Rhode Island remains strong, particularly in existing markets, Ferguson and Fahlman said. ■

OWNERS:

Bruce and Eleanor Ferguson

TYPE OF BUSINESS: Manufacturing

LOCATIONS:

130 Ernest St., Providence, and 901 Commerce Ave., New Castle, Pa.

EMPLOYEES:

125

YEAR ESTABLISHED:

1927

ANNUAL SALES:

WND