

By Symone Skrzycki



# South Bend Modern Molding

## BREAKING NEW GROUND

“We have no more than 20% of sales in any individual industry. What that allows us to do is, when we’re working on a program, we’re not just thinking through blinders. If we’re looking at the automotive industry (for instance), we’re looking at the broad range we’ve looked at in other industries – other products, other processes.”

*Don Zimmerman, president*

Business is booming at South Bend Modern Molding, which operates a full-service rubber factory. The company’s industrial products are a mainstay of its success, while a new foray into the recycled rubber business is helping to fuel unprecedented growth.

### Quick composite:

- Established in 1942 in Mishawaka
- Approximately 140 employees (the workforce has nearly doubled since 2010)
- Manufactures molded rubber products, rubber assemblies and recycled rubber products
- Two business focuses: historical industrial rubber products and recycled rubber materials

### In the mix:

South Bend Modern Molding (SBMM) makes seals for the automotive (and other) industries, torsion mechanisms (imagine office furniture; it’s the mechanism that brings you forward after you lean back in a chair), lawn and garden edging products and more.

### Empowering employees:

At the heart of operations is a focus on team members. Cross training, open communication and employee recognition are part of the culture.

“Up until the last couple years when we’ve added some new employees, I’d say a good two-thirds of our employee base had been here a minimum of 10 years.”

### Pivotal moments:

- Moving from a 20,000-square-foot building to its current home – a 100,000-square-foot facility – in 1998. With the upgrade came additional equipment and new business opportunities
- Earning ISO-9000 quality management system certification shortly thereafter
- Branching out into the recycled rubber materials market approximately five years ago. Overall sales have jumped by more than 50% in that time

### In with the old ...:

Success with recycled rubber products has led to growth in several areas. Among them is consumer retail.

“In some cases, we’re shrink wrapping products that are picked up from our factory and taken (directly) to stores. That connection allows our employees to become more excited about what they’re making.”

