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Two Years after Fire, Diamond Fiberglass Rises from Ashes

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Two 21½-foot fiberglass containers left the Diamond Fiberglass warehouse for the Port of Victoria on Friday morning. According to company officials, the shipment of these vessels represents a colossal comeback from a fire that burned down their building and disrupted a \$5 million order backlog.

"In terms of diameter, they're the largest tanks we've ever built," said Diamond Fiberglass President Don Porr. "It was part of our vision before the fire, so to have it come all the way to fruition after the fire is pretty cool."

For the Port of Victoria, the shipment also represents new horizons.

The Port of Victoria's new executive director, Sean Stibich, said he's excited for new equipment manufacturers to come to the port, which mostly handles liquid and bulk cargo.

"Even if they come only once or twice, it makes people aware of what they can do here," Stibich said.

Porr said the shipment is only the beginning of a bright future for the company. During the rebuilding after the fire, which occurred exactly two years ago, the company redesigned the plant to run more efficiently and bought new equipment.

"We've probably never been in a better position in the life of the company," Porr said.

At its facility off N.W. Zac Lentz Parkway, Diamond Fiberglass offers new services in addition to continuing to make fiberglass vessels used in the food industry, in odor control, as storage for corrosive products such as hydrochloric acid and for use in the oil and gas industry.

Porr said the company's products are in high demand because of their high quality and ability to be customized. Diamond Fiberglass is one of fewer than 10 companies in the U.S. and Canada that have an American Society of Mechanical Engineers Reinforced Thermoset Plastic Corrosion-Resistant Equipment Certification.

The fire and the company's subsequent decrease in production shocked the market, Porr said, but production is now at 100% of what it was before.

Porr said the company's current success came only after a long, difficult journey.

The fire was only the beginning of the calamities the company faced.

"Eight weeks after the fire, Hurricane Harvey hits," Porr said. "Six weeks after that, our bank backs out of doing the loan for us. I spent four months looking for a new one. Then, when I finally get a new one and close on it, my contractor quits and now I have to go back out. It takes me three more months to get a contractor lined up and then prices have gone up 15-20%. It was a vicious cycle."

In the meantime, he said, employees faced difficult work conditions inside the temporary facilities they erected beside the location where their building once stood. He said the company lost about 30% of its workforce during this time.

The new building opened in October 2018, almost a year after their initial completion date. Each month Diamond Fiberglass was running operations out of its temporary tents, Porr said, the company lost \$150,000 to \$200,000.

The company only recently became profitable again.

After the setbacks, Diamond Fiberglass Vice President Paul Cohen said, the company, which relies heavily on repeat business, was able to bounce back because of its willingness to put customers first and refer business to competitors.

"It's not common in our industry for competitors to share information at the level that we did," Cohen said.

Porr said he attributes the company's comeback to dedicated employees. With a recuperated staff of 73 employees, he said he looks forward to the company's return to normalcy.

?It was a team effort all the way,? he said.

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Top of Form