

DMI INDUSTRIES, INC.

By Russ Willcutt



With customers including the world's major turbine OEMs, this company has built a reputation as a premium tower manufacturer.

IT HAS BEEN SAID THAT WHEN ONE DOOR CLOSES,

another one opens. For DMI Industries that door opened wide in 1999, when it was seeking to grow beyond its agricultural roots into new markets. “We had an opportunity to quote on fabricating and welding some large steel frames that were about the size of an automobile,” according to Belinda Forknell, who is in charge of marketing and public relations for the company. “We later discovered that these objects were the bed frames that are mounted on top of utility-scale wind towers. While we didn’t land the order, that experience set us on the path toward manufacturing towers for the wind industry, and I guess you could say that the rest is history.”

Founded as the Dakota Machine Tool Company in 1978, focusing on machine tools and reconditioned equipment for resale, it shifted to custom manufacturing in 1986, the next year beginning to produce sugar-beet pilers and then sugar diffusers. Although it had capitalized on the sugar-beet boom of the late eighties and nineties, once that market began to shrink it started searching for a new direction, resulting in its serendipitous entry into the wind-energy market. Over the past decade DMI has worked hard to earn its reputation as one of the most trusted wind-tower manufacturers in North America. “We have fabricated towers for nearly every major wind turbine OEM in the world, in fact,” Forknell says. “And that’s a lot of towers.”

They are constructed at three DMI facilities—West Fargo, North Dakota; Tulsa, Oklahoma; and Fort Erie, Ontario—representing 770,000 square feet of manufacturing space and employing approximately 500 individuals in total. Strategically located, these facilities are found within 500 miles of 75 percent of the nation’s wind farms, and the company’s acquisition by the Otter Tail Corporation in 1990 bolstered its entry into the wind-energy market at a time when it was building momentum throughout the United States and Canada.

As part of its due diligence company officials asked pertinent questions such as who are the potential customers, and where are they currently obtaining their towers? With most being built in Texas and the Southeastern U.S., they quickly realized that their location was much closer to where most farms were actually being built. Its experience in manufacturing large metal parts was also an asset, and after

meeting with an OEM that required 14 towers for a project in Wisconsin on a tight schedule, DMI landed its first wind-tower order.

Since that time the company has continued researching the wind industry, staying abreast of developing requirements, technologies, and opportunities to help its customers reach their professional goals. “We are constantly working to gain insights and develop new processes that make it possible for us to deliver towers of the highest quality to our clients,” Forknell says, “and our annual production capacity currently supports about 3,000MW of wind-derived energy being delivered into the power grid.”

In securing its reputation as an industry leader, the company utilizes its manufacturing team in developing exclusive DMI-engineered technologies while following a rigorous system of quality controls to manufacture high-tech towers equal to the incredibly demanding specifications required by the wind industry. DMI relies on the highest-quality, cleanest steel plate for secure and dependable welds, form-fit flanges for the highest performance in the field, advanced coatings to withstand the toughest environments while providing smooth contours, and rigorous checks and balances to ensure that the highest standards are being met by all of its material suppliers. In addition, it provides logistical support so that deliveries are made on schedule, thereby contributing to a project’s overall efficiency and cost effectiveness.

Just as its home within the Otter Tail Corporation family has strengthened its activities in the wind industry, DMI provides reciprocal benefits to its parent company as well, sharing valuable insights with its sister entity—the Otter Tail Power Company—that will help it realize its goal of acquiring 18 percent of its total energy portfolio from wind in 2010. As is the case with any successful manufacturer, however, its focus remains on its customers.

“Our goal is to help them lower manufacturing costs, to provide them with stronger, more-reliable towers, and to eliminate extra work during assembly at the project site. We believe that by manufacturing and delivering quality towers that hold up over time and in demanding environments, we’re actually decreasing the long-term costs of wind-farm ownership,” Forknell says. “And that’s something that we take very seriously.”