

# PROFILE

## BROADWIND ENERGY, INC.

By Russ Willcutt



With expertise in manufacturing gears and towers—and providing crucial blade, gearbox, and O&M services—this company is poised to help carry the wind industry forward.

**JUST AS A WIND TECHNICIAN'S** adjustments ensure that a turbine is operating in top form, smart companies are constantly fine-tuning their operations as well. One that has paid particular attention to its structure and direction is Broadwind Energy, Inc., focusing on its strengths as a multi-faceted manufacturer and service provider for the global wind industry.

"Broadwind Energy is a collection of companies with longtime expertise in manufacturing gears and towers, and in providing O&M services," according to Peter Duprey, who became the company's president and CEO last December after stints with ACCIONA Energy North America and GE Energy, among others. "We acquired our tower business in 2006, our gearing business—Brad Foote Gear Works, which has been manufacturing high-precision gearing for the past 87 years—in 2007, and our services business in 2008, which provides blade and gearbox repairs and O&M services to the wind industry. We also opened a new multi-megawatt wind turbine drivetrain service center in Abilene, Texas, in February of this year, where one of our two tower manufacturing facilities is located."

Expected to eventually employ as many as 60 individuals, the service center will remanufacture gearboxes and repair blades, while also providing O&M services to the burgeoning Texas wind farm market and surrounding environs. The facility will also offer warranties on the repaired gearboxes, with significant savings compared to purchasing new. "I think we're at a point in the evolution of the wind industry, particularly in this country, where it makes sense to start paying more attention to the service side of things," Duprey says. "At the Abilene facility we'll take a used gearbox apart, put in new bearings and gears, and have it ready to replace a unit that's broken down. Part of our strategy is to be able to mobilize a team to go out in the field, pull the disabled gearbox and replace it, and then return the broken gearbox to our shop where it will be completely remanufactured and then run for up to eight hours on our test stand, which can handle gearboxes up to 3MW. We see the Abilene Wind Turbine Service Center

as a great resource for the industry, and also a way of linking our gear manufacturing expertise with our O&M service capabilities. We'll also be able to repair cracks or flaws in blades, which we can repair uptower or, for more serious defects, bring down and repair in the shop. So we feel that a major business segment will involve performing these types of 'non-routine' repairs, and handling labor-intensive upgrades such as installing auto-lube systems."

As for its tower manufacturing operations, Broadwind Energy is applying its welding and metalworking expertise to designing and building the stronger, taller towers required by the larger turbines being produced. Evidence that the company is increasingly known for these complicated, thick-plated towers—it was the first in the country to produce a 100-meter tower, in fact—is found in Goldwind USA's decision to award Broadwind a contract to provide about 70 of its 85-meter towers for the Shady Oaks wind project in Illinois. More proof of its renown occurred earlier this year, when a certain individual toured the tower manufacturing plant in Manitowoc, Wisconsin, the morning after giving his State of the Union address.

"When we learned that President Barack Obama would be visiting, we decided to set the tour up in such a way that he would have the opportunity to observe every step of the tower manufacturing process, because it's a lot more complicated than simply bending metal plates into shape," Duprey explains. "The employees certainly loved it, and he was able to learn a little more about our industry as well."

Even more importantly, the President's visit made a larger point about the contribution the renewable energies industry is making to the U.S. economy. With companies such as Broadwind Energy building new facilities all across the country, creating new jobs to the benefit of the surrounding community, there is reason to hope for a resurgence of the manufacturing workforce throughout North America. "I think we can certainly bring hardcore manufacturing back to the United States," Duprey says, "and the wind industry is providing an excellent example of how to go about it." ✎