

Figure 2. Allied focuses on small precision P/M parts; pinion gear for cameras.

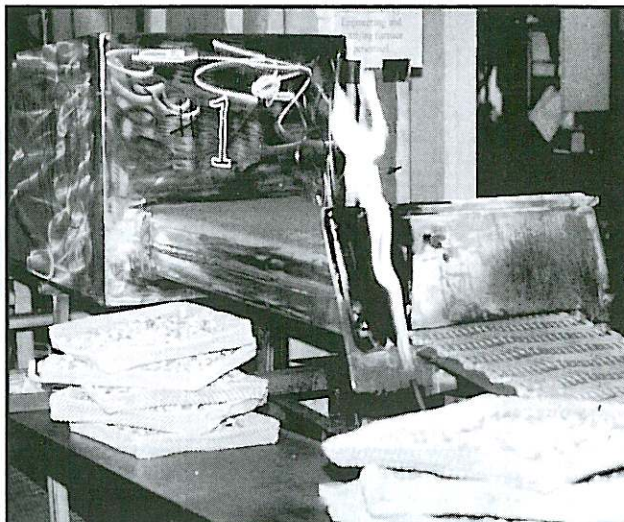


Figure 3. Humpback sintering furnace.

basics of compacting and sintering. Mark and Diana purchased the business in 1997.

Informal in style, Mark is very serious about growing Allied and invested \$1.5 million in new equipment in 1997. He believes strongly in partnering with customers and learning from them. "We are sponges," he said. "Learning new things all the time. I don't know it all."

Allied enjoys a good relationship with its 42 employees and offers an incentive program based on team performance and continuous improvement. Plant workers are encouraged to reduce waste in every way. "Our employees are very important," Foster says. "They make it happen."

Foster believes firmly that ISO certification compliance is an important business tool. "We have found a lot of value in it," he said.

Foster also focuses on customer service and maintaining close communication links with customers. Because personal service and fast reaction are important, he eschews impersonal voice mail at the company switchboard.

Without layers of bureaucracy he believes small manufacturing companies can still survive and prosper. "We can make quicker decisions on opportunities and customer needs," he said. "The future is the fast eating the slow and not the big eating the small."

Foster is an accomplished pilot and maintains a rigorous training schedule to keep himself physically and mentally alert. He dreams about qualifying for the famous "iron man" triathlon in Hawaii - a gut wrenching feat of swimming 2.4 miles, biking 112 miles and running 26.2 miles. His faithful black lab, Clyde, has the run of the offices, welcoming customers and vendors, Figure 4.

Foster is confident about P/M's future which he believes is still a growth industry. He sees a trend towards designing smaller parts with thin walls to fit into smaller spaces. He finds membership in MPIF, the industry's trade association, very helpful and is an active member of the MPIF Industry Development Board. He plans to expand and recently purchased three acres to add an additional 1,394m² (15,000ft²) of space onto the current building within the next two years.



Figure 4. Mark Foster and Clyde welcome customers.