

Wallingford's Winchester Electronics Shifts strategies to stay competitive

By Mary Ellen Godin

Record-Journal staff

WALLINGFORD

— It's not as if Winchester Electronics salesmen can walk into an office and show a suitcase full of copper or fiberoptic cable connectors. But that is similar to how Winchester Electronics Corp. once marketed its products — fitting devices to a use. But as the competition heated up in the interconnect sector, the manufacturer needed to shift strategies.

Connectors are the small copper parts, boards or boxes and cables that connect electronics to each other to communicate or relay data.

Michael P. Driscoll came to Winchester Electronics in 1988, and after a series of promotions, was named company president in 2000.

Since then, Driscoll has taken the lead in directing Winchester Electronics' transition from connector manufacturer to a global operator specializing in the de-

Please see **Winchester** /C5



Photos by Johnathon Henninger /Record-Journal

Above: Michael Driscoll is CEO of Winchester Electronics in Wallingford.

Below: Some of the part manufactured by Winchester.



Winchester Electronics shifts strategies to stay competitive

From Page C4

sign, development and use of interconnect technology solutions.

Driscoll sent some operations overseas and painfully streamlined the company's manufacturing. To attract key talent in the Central Connecticut area, he moved Winchester Electronics' assembly and headquarters from Watertown to 62 Barnes Road North.

As chief executive officer, Driscoll joined the Audax Group of Boston in a 2006 management buyout from Winchester's parent company Northrop Grumman Corp.

Today the company's customers include, Airbus, Boeing, ABC, NBC, Fox, CBS, Philips, GE Healthcare, IBM, Hewlett Packard, LSI, Motorola, Alcatel-Lucent and more.

Winchester has fewer than 100 employees at its headquarters and manufacturing plant, but also has sales and production offices in Rock Hill, N.C., China, Malaysia and Mexico.

To broaden its product line, Winchester Electronics recently purchased Advanced Interconnect Inc. of Franklin, Mass. and Kings Electronics Inc. of Rock Hill, S.C. Driscoll said the acquisitions will bring 50 to 100 new jobs to the Wallingford operation, and increase the company's sales beyond \$100 million.

Driscoll talks about the company's move to Central Connecticut, the new acquisitions, and its future.

Q: Why was relocating to Wallingford a smart move at the time?

A: The location in Watertown is a great place for blue-collar workers but not a great place for electronic technology. This area is fantastic for that and has proven to be a home run. You can get to anyplace in the state in less than an hour. The building here is open, we did away with the public address system, and overall better for communication.

Q: What were the benefits of the Audax partnership?

A: Northrop Grumman would keep you from doing things you wanted to do in a corporate world. The things we required would run contrary to their operation. A year ago, we partnered with Audax, they have tremendous ties in the financial industry. As a result, we acquired two companies. As part of Northrup, we were struggling to be in the \$50 million range. Now, with Audex, we can see over \$100 million. Winchester can focus on strategic acquisitions.

Q: How have the acquisitions increased Winchester's product lines?

A: The two companies bring us into the commercial aviation, broadcast, military, medical, commercial aviation, telecommunication and industrial sectors.

Q: What have been your biggest challenges?

A: Re-energizing this company. In the last five years, I've had to make dramatic changes. We used to make a lot of commodity products. The connector industry is huge. To make yourself relevant, you need to have a certain niche that resonates with customers. Our products centered on high manufacturing. But the global economy was bringing new challenges. Our customers started to move to Asia. We needed to bring on the right kind of people with the right skill set. Now I can draw from a talent pool not available in that area. The toughest decision, I think, was in 2001. We just came off the biggest year Winchester had had. I made the decision to end the commodity product line and make 600 jobs redundant. But it was the right decision for the company and for them. We still keep track of them, and we worked with the state through the (federal) Trade Reduction Act to get retraining. We wanted to make sure these people ended up on their feet. Some said it was the best thing to happen to them.

Q: What's next?

A: We're now looking at additional acquisitions to get in the \$300 million range. We're looking at acquisitions in Europe. Europe has an outlet of markets we are not in today. Our business in Asia is growing and our manufacturing capabilities are the same in the U.S., Malaysia and in Asia. Manufacturing has integrated into the global footprint. We deal with U.S. companies with global operations, those companies are a strategic plus for us. Our sales staff is based in our overseas buildings, and we have an IT structure in place to meet every week.

Q: What is your role as CEO?

A: I am the guy who develops the strategies: I give everybody the 'what and why.' They come up with the how.