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Growth STRATEGIES

Proximity and space makes Caledonia Industrial Estates an easy investment decision

WHILE APPROACHING MONCTON on the TransCanada Highway, the road curves ever so slightly, as if to better showcase Al-Pack Enterprises's manufacturing-supplies facility in Caledonia Industrial Estates. Al-Pack president Louis LeBlanc admits that highway frontage and visibility were factors in the company's decision to build its plant there five years ago. Not only did highway proximity facilitate quicker shipping of products to clients but the six-acre piece of land also gave them space for future expansions.

The 43,000-square-foot plant is a far cry from Al-Pack's modest debut in Vernon Allen's living room, from which Allen incorporated the company with LeBlanc in 1995. Before that, they were both working in sales in the transportation industry when they saw an opportunity for manufacturing packaging supplies. What started as a two-man operation now employs 75 people full-time. From shipping boxes of all sizes to foam inserts for those boxes, Al-Pack produces or distributes everything needed for shipping goods, including pallets, bubble wrap, and strapping supplies.

In 1999 another opportunity arose when the City of Moncton introduced the household-waste separation program, and Al-Pack started producing green and blue plastic bags. "We grew and diversified the company by listening to our customers' needs," says Allen, the president of Al-Pack Holdings. "We now distribute mainly in Atlantic Canada, but we also do private labels for clients across Canada and our compostable bags are shipped to the U.S." In addition to the plant in Moncton, Al-Pack has an office and a warehouse in St. John's, as well as an office and a warehouse in Guelph, Ont.

In Moncton, the 24/7 production line of plastic bags which uses a 50-foot-tall extruder is a sight to behold. Oil-based resin pellets resembling small white hailstones are mixed with concentrated colour pellets and heated until the combination liquefies. Air is injected to create a bubble in the centre of the plastic sheet that then goes through a series of rollers to iron out the wrinkles as it cools. Logos are printed, then the sheet is cut and folded according to the type of bags being produced. Allen looks at the extruder with proprietary pride as he explains the process, adding that there are future plans in the works. "The building has been designed so we can open this back wall when needed," he says. "We already have plans for expansion starting in 2014." —M.L.