

Reason To Smile

ExportGA expands Woodstock company's global reach

By Jennifer Giarratano

Georgia's 2016 SBA Exporter of the Year, Carl Hazenberg, enjoys telling potential customers that his Woodstock company, Everlast Synthetic Products, has done business on six of the seven continents. When someone asks where they haven't sold their seawall product, the joke is on.

"We haven't been able to find a client in Antarctica," he says, grinning.

Hazenberg has every reason to smile about his company's success according to Rick Martin, director of the International Trade Center for the University of Georgia's Small Business Development Center (SBDC).

"Not many businesses of his size and in his industry can say they've successfully conducted business in so many markets," Martin says. "Where many companies would shy away from areas considered high-risk, Carl is willing to investigate these opportunities."

Hazenberg and his partners, Brad Lund and Jason Nelms, started Everlast in May 2005. Everlast markets, sells and promotes an outdoor-grade PVC and fiberglass-composite vinyl sheet piling used for shoreline protection and stabilization, primarily as seawalls and bulkheads. Their customers are marine distributors, contractors, engineers, government entities and developers.

A vendor, rather than a potential client or market, brought the export services of the SBDC to Hazenberg and his partners' attention. This vendor's need had them seek help from Martin, who saw their small business's international market potential and invited them to participate in the ExportGA training program.

"We do a lot of work with a distributor in the Netherlands," says Hazenberg. "He needed a Certificate of Origin. We thought we'd go through the Chamber of Commerce. Jason used to be a Cherokee County commissioner. He knew someone at the chamber who was with the Small Business Association, who directed us to Rick."

Martin learned the business had been reactively exporting to certain markets. "They knew there was demand and that their sales would grow if they looked for opportunities," he says. "So I helped them with basic information on how to find trade data to identify markets and showed them the resources I use to find information. When I mentioned our ExportGA program, they signed up."

In ExportGA, a team of trade experts from the UGA SBDC, Small Business Administration, Georgia Department of Economic Development and U.S. Commercial Service are assigned to participants as resources to help them establish their future export strategy. Martin manages the program, working with his colleagues to create the content and bringing in interns from UGA's Terry College of Business who do work for the companies during its three months of workshops.

Hazenberg, a graduate of ExportGA, now uses the resources of the SBDC, its U.S. Export Assistance Center partners and industry contacts to evaluate trade projects and partners and to mitigate his risk.

"This program taught me several important things," says Hazenberg. "For example, the insuring of open accounts for export through Exim Bank and understanding letters of credit. We secured a huge project overseas and most of that was done through a letter of credit. Understanding that process made it flow much smoother."

Carl Hazenberg

Everlast Synthetic Products



Photo: Matt Fortson

"We also learned how to understand tariffs on the other side, understand the harmonized tariff codes and how to classify products. All of this information has been very important."

This knowledge has helped sales grow. With a steady employment of 10 staff members, three-year sales have risen 100 percent.

Hazenberg also gives back to the SBDC, serving on its State Advisory Council to provide feedback and guidance in the SBDC's efforts to support small businesses around Georgia.

"Carl is very conscientious and produces a high-quality product representative of U.S. products. When he receives information through ExportGA or the SBDC that might help his operation, he uses it to improve and grow his business," says Martin.

"Working with Rick is great!" says Hazenberg. "If he doesn't have the answer, he knows people who do. His is practical, useful information, much that I didn't know was out there. His matchmaking with representatives of different companies that come to Georgia, and the networking this allows, is of great benefit to any company going global."