

GROWTH: Val-Fab's certifications allow work with government, military jobs

From E-1

company growth continued. In April 1990, Gary Van Linn joined Picard as a partner and the business moved to a 20,000-square foot building on Neenah's Jackson Street in 1992. Steady growth during the 1990s led Val-Fab to move into its current 40,000-square foot space on Appleblossom Drive.

"We hope to triple our square footage in the near future," Lamers said.

Today, Val-Fab is organized into three departments — construction services, journeymen/field services and custom metal fabrication services.

Val-Fab saw its business grow as it completed a shift in markets served. At its outset, the metal fabricator did mainly service work for area paper mills. In the early 1990s, the company averaged \$3 million in annual sales and "two-thirds of it was paper-related," Picard said. Today, less than 10 percent of the work is from the paper industry, he added.

During the last three years, Val-Fab has increased its marketing to prime contractors that service the federal government. When the Small Business Administration added a new category — service-disabled, veteran-owned small business — it opened growth opportunities to the Neenah company.

"Since I own 51 percent of



VAL-FAB INC. PRESIDENT Keith Picard stands in the production room of his custom metal fabricating business in Neenah.

MADE FROM METAL

Val-Fab fabricates using these materials:

- Stainless steel
- Polished stainless steel
- Carbon steel
- Aluminum
- Metal alloys, including hastelloy, inonel and monel.

the company, I knew we qualified automatically," Picard said. "By law, companies like General Dynamics (which secure government contracts) must spend 25 cents of every dollar with small and disadvantaged businesses, such as women and minority-owned."

The company has taken advantage of that rule change. Val-Fab now supplies

brackets that attach armor to military Stryker vehicles through a contract that goes through 2007.

Doing business with the U.S. Navy, however, required the metal fabricator to seek more seals of approval.

"We received ISO 9001:2000 certification in December 2004 and ASME (American Society of Mechanical Engineers) certification in May," said Val-Fab industrial engineer Robert Beaupre. "Both are quality standards known worldwide and ensure meeting customer specifications and quality requirements."

Recognized as a global quality standard, ISO (short for the International Organization for Standardization) certification concentrates on all business aspects that affect a product's quality.

ASME certification covers some of the same issues as ISO, but includes the process of designing, fabricating and testing a pressure vessel.

Beaupre was assigned the task of securing these two certificates in record time. ISO certification normally is a one- to two-year process, but Val-Fab received it in nine months. Culminating with a two-day audit, Val-Fab received ASME certification in five months, a process that can take up to a year to complete.

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Poised on the cusp of continued business growth, Val-Fab's only obstacle may be finding enough qualified metal fabricators.

"We have implemented a long-term training initiative for people looking for a career in the welding/metal fabrication trade," said Renae Langel, Val-Fab human resource manager.

Working with Fox Valley Technical College, Val-Fab has implemented a training

program for new employees. FVTC provides classroom instruction and testing before new hires enter the shop, easing the training burden on Val-Fab managers and lead people.

"It's fun when everyone is having a good time and you're making money again," Picard said. "But it's been tough for a long time."

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