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Missouri Bullet Co. known nationally, worldwide

SUE STERLING Staff writer Jun 4, 2018



Missouri Bullet Co. owners Jo Ann and Brad Alpert stand in front of shelves holding their inventory of more than 4 million bullets that are boxed and ready to ship.

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SUE STERLING | Star-Journal

KINGSVILLE – In 11 years, Missouri Bullet Co. has grown from a startup business in a 600-square-foot building to one of the largest – if not the largest – manufacturer of cast lead bullets for reloaders in the nation, and possibly the world.

The business recently received national recognition with a five-page spread highlighting their quality products and innovative approach in the latest issue of Handloader Magazine.

Brad and Jo Ann Alpert started the home-based business on Southwest 25 Road in January 2007, to supplement their retirement, and by late 2009, they were planning their third expansion.

Since April 2014, the company has operated from a 4,500-square-foot building where more than 20 million bullets are manufactured, packaged and shipped annually to some 40,000 individual Internet customers and distributors across the country.

One distributor, Graf and Sons, Mexico, Missouri, exports Missouri Bullet Co. products to countries around the world.

Graf orders every other week and sends a truck twice a month to pick up the orders, with a special order filled by the barreload.

"We're licensed by the Department of State to export across the globe," Brad said.

Because of the large shipping volume, the U.S. Postal Service now sends a route truck directly to the facility every day to pick up pallets of shipping cartons containing boxed bullets. Shipping costs alone are \$125,000 a year.

The company has seven employees, including Brad, up from two full-time workers and one part-time employee in 2009, and their payroll contributes about \$350,000 to the local economy annually.

They also try to buy as many products and services locally as possible.

Jo Ann operates a separate business and is paid by Missouri Bullet Co. "to do the administrative stuff."

With more than 4 million bullets in stock, boxed and ready to ship, they can usually fill orders and ship within 48 hours.

"(Distributors) all know we can handle the volume and we're nimble enough we can change priorities to meet demands," Brad said.

They had to construct the new building, started in the fall of 2012, he said, because they had no more room to expand in the old building.

The new building is designed to minimize lead exposure with an air exchanger in the casting area.

“We wanted to be proactive on health and safety,” Jo Ann said.

At the company’s request, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health checked the facility last year for air contamination and employees for lead exposure.

“Everybody was fine,” she said. “We were reassured we were doing things correctly.”

The Obama presidency, which generated fears of restrictions among gun owners, “brought an extra \$1 million in revenue” to the company, Brad said.

“All (Obama) had to do was sign an executive order making lead bullets illegal,” Jo Ann said, noting that even jacketed bullets have a lead core.

Bullet manufacturers could not keep up with demand, Brad said. They ordered eight more casting machines to add to the nine already running.

Upon receiving four of the machines, they built a small annex while awaiting the remainder of the machines from the only manufacturer.

Because they paid in advance, they received two of the machines ordered by another company that could not pay, Jo Ann said.

Bullet manufacturers were all scrambling to complete orders with some having a two-year backlog, Brad said, adding, “It was a crazy few years.”

Missouri Bullet Co. picked up contracts to make lead cores from other companies that could not service their regular customers, he said.

With 17 casting machines, all set to different calibers, Missouri Bullet Co. now has the largest infrastructure for cast bullets in the world, and is the leader in rare and obsolete bullet designs.

Most manufacturers offer a single hardness, but Missouri Bullet Co. offers two, including a hard lead and a soft lead. The variation in hardness allows for low velocity for target shooting and higher velocity for hunting and action shooting, Brad said. "No one else does that."

"That's what makes us unique," Jo Ann said.

The bullets are made from the same mold, which saves on expense, Jo Ann said.

Jo Ann said their bullets are named, with the names denoting the history of the bullet, such as "Cowboy," "Outlaws" and "Trooper," and the descriptions are listed on the box.

They also began offering coated bullets three years ago, with coated bullets now comprising more than 50 percent of their sales.

"If we had not gone to coating, we'd be out of business," she said.

The Hi-Tek coated bullets are not lubricated, can be used in indoor ranges where lead bullets are not allowed, there is no smoke and the bullets are harder, Jo Ann said.

They enclosed a part of the concrete picnic area to accommodate the coating process and bought four large industrial ovens. The coating is mixed in cement mixers.

They have a .300 blackout bullet that is coated in black and a 7.65 Russian military bullet coated in red.

They also invested in a mill and lathe so they can make their own parts for the machines.

Economies of scale saved Missouri Bullet from having to raise prices," Brad said, noting the last increase was four years ago.

"We're making so many (bullets) we're able to withstand the pressure," he said, even though their vendors charge more.

"Some day we'll have to (raise prices), but for now we're good," he said.

They control alloy prices by locking in 12-month contracts.

Missouri Bullet Co. offers discounts to active and retired military, law enforcement officers, National Rifle Association instructors, first responders and gun clubs.

“We’re the only ones who do (discounts for) registered gun clubs,” Brad said.

The club gets a discount code and members can order using the code.

They also were the only company to take credit cards, he said. Other companies had a form that buyers had to fill out and mail back.

Because of their remote location, they said they were used to doing business online and knew how to accommodate credit purchases.

Both Brad and Jo Ann confess to being “computer geeks,” and set up their own web site. At first, they had servers in the house, but then found a hosting company that can “keep everything secure,” Jo Ann said.

They advertise nationally to their target audience – “people who do reloading,” Brad said.

“People in the neighborhood don’t know we’re here,” he said, “but people in Finland do.”

Sue Sterling