

More growth is on the horizon United Glass & Panel Systems *As printed in the Monday, March 27, 2006 Canton Repository*

By G. PATRICK KELLEY REPOSITORY BUSINESS EDITOR

PLAIN TWP. - When Tom Nesbitt finished the first year as owner of United Glass & Panel Systems, he didn't know that the company would grow tenfold in 10 years.

He also didn't know that he would be fabricating massive glass walls for places like Detroit Metro Airport.

Right now, the company has projects in progress for places like the Aultman Hospital 2010 building and education center, the new GlenOak High, Jackson High and YMCA, Alliance Community Hospital, Akron-Canton Regional Airport, Hudson High and the Stark County Office Building.

All that with about 45 people doing installation or fabricating preglazed panels that are ready to install on buildings. That prefabrication is where the growth is, Nesbitt said. The company grew 30 percent from 2003 to 2004, and he predicts it will bring more growth in the future.



PHOTO: SCOTT HECKEL

Tom Nesbitt, president and founder of United Glass & Panel Systems, sees growth for the company in its ability to fabricate glass panels that take less labor to install in the field.

GOT ITS START IN 1996

The company, which began in 1996 by making specialty entranceways for commercial buildings, has found a niche where it specializes in custom fabrication of glass-wall assemblies — many of them for out-of-state competitors who install them.

The lack of skilled labor in the field helped United into that niche, Nesbitt said. "We've gotten ourselves into producing a product that is preglazed, and takes about two-thirds of the field labor out." It's that labor shortage that will probably spur more growth on that side of the business, he said.

United manufactured 72,000 square feet of glass wall for the Northwest Airlines terminal at Detroit Metro, and about 45,000 square feet for the Lear Co. headquarters in Southfield, Mich.

"He wants to do something that challenges the company constantly," said Field Superintendent Bill Myher. "He doesn't want to just do storefronts."

A lot of United's contracts are in the \$1 million to \$2 million range, Nesbitt said.

Local people can see United's work on the new Aultman 2010 building, and soon in the 60-foot skylight that will put a roof over the atrium of the Stark County Office Building.

Nesbitt started United in 1996 after his partnership with a glass company ended. The first building was an 8,000-square-foot facility in Louisville. But with the need for room to manufacture and to keep more material on hand, the company moved to 7830 Cleveland Ave. NW three years ago, where it has about 41,000 square feet.

NO INVENTORY

But “there’s really no inventory,” Myher said. Although the company might have \$2 million in material at any one time, it’s there to be used for jobs in progress

On entranceways or building exteriors, United is in on planning from day one to completion. “We do a lot of design-build work. We can create an image,” Nesbitt said. The work can integrate stone, metal panels, glass and other materials.

“If an owner has an idea, we can bring it to life,” he said.

Keeping up takes investment in equipment and technology, he said. In addition to expensive shop equipment to perform the exacting work, the company has five engineers who employ computer-assisted design techniques.

But by doing most of the fabrication in its own shop, United has greater flexibility and much better control over projects. Changes to design specifications can be more quickly accommodated without having to work with third-party fabricators.

