

By Sean Lyons

All things energy

Neenah-based JETA grows to \$20 million supplier of industrial tools

In the past 10 years, JETA Corporation of Neenah has come a long way economically and geographically while trekking the country to distribute energy-related tools to industrial businesses large and small.

Linda Grow, president and CEO, founded the company in 2004. She says that the company's decision to provide tools for energy companies has been important to JETA Corporation's success.

"We started as a distribution channel, and we decided to focus ourselves more on the energy channel, which is fossil fuel plants, nuclear sites," Grow says, "It goes in many, many different directions. When I say 'energy channel,' I thought: 'What is always going to be around?' People need energy, whether we're in a depression time, or whether we're in a successful time. So that's where we focus ourselves, and it's been a good fit for us."

JETA started with a \$65,000 investment its first year and ballooned into a \$20 million company by the end of 2013, quickly growing from a regional supplier to a national one that now distributes products from more than 2,000 manufacturers to businesses nationally. The company lists a thick catalog of tool types that it ships, including: electric power tools, pneumatic tools, hydraulic tools, pumps and accessories, material handling supplies, temporary power and lighting supplies, cutting tools, hand tools, storage supplies, ladders,



JETA President and CEO Linda Grow founded her company in 2004, providing tools for energy companies. Today her \$20 million, Neenah-based company supplies more than 50,000 items from more than 500 brands, including everything from electric power, pneumatic and hydraulic tools to temporary power and lighting supplies.

welding equipment and accessories, identification, composites and coating products, environmental tools, specialty products, safety equipment and supplies, electrical and MRO, along with a back to back online storefront that can be customized to client specific requirements.

The company acquired its name from "Jet A fuel," one of the most common types of jet fuel. In adopting the name, the company likened its services to the swift and efficient movements of the crafts that Jet A fuel feeds. Along the way, the company has been certified by the Women's

Business Development Center and the Women's Business Enterprise National Council, and was named the Small Business Supplier of 2013 by Pacific Gas & Electric of San Francisco. The company has 20 employees and retains a position as a key player in the industrial distribution industry.

"Pacific Gas & Electric is pleased to have JETA Corporation as one of our Supplier Development Program candidates since 2010," says Del Ritchie, supply chain manager at Pacific Gas & Electric. "JETA provides a number of value-added services to PG&E, including developing a DBE

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tracking program and an innovative program to reduce lead times of critical and hard-to-get materials. Suppliers like JETA help Diablo Canyon Nuclear Power Plant operate in a safe and efficient manner.”

Along with Pacific Gas & Electric, JETA sports other big-name business partners, including Michel's Corporation, URS Energy and Babcock & Wilcox. While remaining a local employer, JETA Corporation's business with these transnational companies has garnered plenty of attention.

JETA Corporation represents an essential part of the regional economy, says Larry Burkhardt, executive vice president of the Fox Cities Regional Partnership.

“The company's focus on supplying tooling and other products to the energy industry is consistent with the nation's move toward increasing energy self-reliance,” Burkhardt says. “Boasting an impressive customer list, the company obviously occupies a position as a leading supplier to our country's growing energy sector.”

Grow traces her drive to succeed to when she was growing up in Sault Ste. Marie, Mich., at a time when the federal government did not recognize her family's tribe, the Sault Tribe of the Chippewa Indians. Without the government's recognition, poverty remained a problem for the city's tribal population. Grow credits her grandmother, who attended tribal meetings with her, for teaching her how to cope with challenges.

“I learned that you don't quit,” Grow says. “Just because obstacles are put in your way, or you can't see the end result, you keep going. I learned that from my grandmother. Before we were even recognized as a tribe a long time ago,

I went to a lot of meetings and a lot of organizational things with her, and I saw how hard they struggled to get recognized by the federal government.”

From her experiences, Grow not only developed a strong work ethic, but learned to be empathetic of others' circumstances, particularly those of minorities who find themselves discriminated against in the job market.

“That shaped me more than anything, I think,” Grow says.

She also applies that same empathy when considering the importance of encouraging more people, particularly women, to work in industries requiring skills in science, technology and math (STEM). As part of her business mantra, she believes issues such as these can be solved with a dose of pragmatism.

“I feel like younger women aren't initiated into this (STEM),” Grow says. “They feel like this is a man's world, and I really think that they need to go

into science and engineering. I don't know if there's a fear of failure. I feel differently about failure. It's not really failure; it's a learning curve. Every time you pick yourself up, you've learned something – either how to do it better, or not to do that particular thing that way.”

Grow reflects on her mindset and how it translates to her hiring policies.

“I've got some girls in here that are just fabulous,” Grow says. “And I think they think back and say, ‘Wow, this is an entirely different field I thought I'd never go down,’ and it's exciting to them. To me, that's a win.”

Grow is pleased that her business has been able to attract people who might never have considered it.

“I like to see that,” Grow says. “Whether it's men or women, I like to see the young people come in and say, ‘I never thought I could do this, but I'm going to have fun learning.’”



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