

Business runs hot and cold

Cryogenics firm moving to Reedsburg

By Ben Bromley
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Adam and Renée Weitzel don't look like rock 'n' rollers, but they know how cool heavy metal can get.

They run Badger Cryogenics, a Baraboo company that for seven years has thrived freezing metal items such as firearm barrels, power plant bearings and block engines. But business really should heat up this week when Badger Cryogenics moves into a Reedsburg industrial park.

The move will allow the Weitzels to offer heat treating, a process that hardens metals such as those used to create plastic molds or stamping dies. They wonder whether Adam, as a staff of one, will be able to keep up with demand for Badger Cryogenics' services once the new building is online.

"There is no heat treater in this part of the state of Wisconsin," Renée Weitzel said. "Over the years, everybody has asked us, 'Do you heat treat?'"

They see heat treating as a logical addition to their cryogenics enterprise. Both processes are used to improve the strength and durability of metal: freezing a metal object to minus-300 degrees evens its surface, while heating metal up to 2,400 degrees hardens it.

Both processes are popular with industrial clients looking to strengthen blades, drill bits and molds.

"This is going to fit together so neatly," Renée said.

How it began

The Weitzels launched the business in 1996 from an 8-foot-by-11-foot garage off Second Street in Baraboo. It all began when Adam, an avid hunter who holds a degree in gunsmithing, was looking to get a gun barrel frozen (doing so increases a gun's durability and improves its aim). He ended up buying a cryogenic processor, doing the job himself and creating a business enterprise.

In 1998 Badger Cryogenics became a full-time enterprise for the former Flambeau Plastics tooling department staffer, and in May 2002 the Weitzels moved their home and business to a rural house and adjacent 1,200 square-foot mechanical shop off O'Neil Road east of Baraboo. This week, after a year of planning, they'll begin moving equipment to Badger Cryogenics' new 2,500-square-foot home.

Why they're moving

The Weitzels are moving the business because they need more space to add heat treating equipment. Reedsburg was an ideal spot because the city has its own power utility: Low rates will save the Weitzels thousands of dollars per month because their equipment uses so

much electricity. Other factors in the move included their need for truck access, which is awkward on rural O'Neil Road, and the (ahem) chilly reception the Weitzels feel they received from the city of Baraboo.

"It will be a huge savings for electrical use," Adam said of the Reedsburg setup. "There was a better reception there for what we wanted to do."

More changes are likely for Badger Cryogenics, which already has one client capable of keeping Adam busy around the clock. He may need to hire a secretary and manager, and it's no accident that the new 1.25-acre site allows for a 12,000 square-foot expansion.

"There's enough business to keep us very busy," he said. "If we can get everything up and running, that won't be a problem."

"We're looking at another expansion real soon," she added.

The Weitzels can't help but marvel at Badger Cryogenics' growth: After all, Adam's office in the new building will be about the size of the garage in which the business began. Their fortunes have risen along with the public's increasing awareness of cryogenics, which, the unfortunate Ted Williams saga notwithstanding, is gaining favor across the country. "It's getting more and more accepted," Adam said. "There's more people calling for quotes on cryogenics rather than wondering what it is."