

## FORGLASS a synchrony of technology and creativity

Once more Looking Ahead, and still this side of Glassman Europe, the editorial team of Glass Machinery Plants & Accessories spoke to FORGLASS CEO, Piotr Knast for an idea of where his company has set its compass for 2023 and beyond.

### **G** LASS MACHINERY PLANTS & ACCESSORIES (GMP&A):

Piotr, give us your summary of the post-pandemic period, your Forglass organisation and current markets?

*Piotr Knast:* When today's world of hi-tech and leveraged finances got hit by COVID-19 many companies went into a tailspin - cut off as they were from their supply chain and/or markets.

What seems to work best for survival in times like these are traditional values. Forglass has been able to maintain the optimal balance, primarily as a creative, technology-driven engineering company that's built upon old-school core values. These include:

People: we hire and retain the best experts we can find indeed we kept them all throughout the pandemic period.

Local production (Europe): all the machines and devices we design for our clients are produced in our own plants in





Poland. This not only makes us independent from supply chain disruptions that we saw other companies experience during the pandemic, but it also makes Forglass the best choice when fast delivery is a priority. Thanks to this philosophy, we've been able to undertake many 'express' projects that our competitors simply weren't able to do. We're presently experiencing a very busy time with many orders and RFPs - all of which have us very optimistic about the coming year.

**GMP&A:** Can you identify any change in your relationships with customers?

**PK:** Yes, one change that's been especially noticeable for a couple of years and which is quite dramatic is that we're no longer considered to be the 'new kids on the block'. We've now earned the respect of the biggest global glass producers, which consider us 'top shelf' partners, not only in conversations - but, more importantly, in serious contracts. Noteworthy, too, is that we've accomplished all this in just a decade, all the while competing with companies that have been around ten times longer.

**GMP&A:** How would you explain the term 'top shelf' in relation to the way glass producers view Forglass today?

**PK:** To do justice to the metaphor 'top shelf partners' we'd need, in our case, to go back to the decades when there was a big divide between Western and Eastern Europe. Given the chance, Eastern Europeans would travel West to perform menial jobs because even those jobs paid much more than people could ever dream to earn in their own countries. To Western businesses, such workers repre-

sented a key resource - namely cheap labour. That trend continued even after the iron curtain fell, despite the fact that many young people in Poland (and in other former 'Eastern Bloc' countries) were receiving much better education as well as starting new companies within the technology sectors. A decade ago, when Forglass was founded as an engineering company with much ambition, the biggest barrier to overcome was that of a perceived notion of 'cheap labour from the East'. And while it was true -at least initially- that Polish





technicians earning PLN did cost less than their German, French or British counterparts who were earning Euros or Pounds, Forglass was hardly keen on being known as a company that provided cheap labour. That challenge took a lot of humble, hard work - doing small projects and always paying attention to excellence whilst going the extra mile for clients. At the same time, our engineers were busy researching and testing new technologies, supporting the glass producers in a variety of challenges, not least that of reducing energy consumption and emissions.

**GMP&A:** Can you identify a time of that change in the perception of Forglass by top, global glass producers?

**PK:** I would say that shift happened around four to five years ago. Major, global glass producers realised that Forglass could offer them much more than labour. The scope and quality of the engineering and workmanship were as good, or better, than what they could expect from their traditional suppliers. A good example of Forglass being considered a 'top shelf' supplier is when one of the aforementioned global glass producers chose us as one of its three key suppliers of furnaces and batch plants to be used for all its projects Europewide. Of course, this has since resulted in many large contracts, the latest of which involved a greenfield construction of a 400 TPD furnace based on our proprietary technology, together with a modern, fully-automated batch plant that also included some of our patented devices.

**GMP&A:** Would it be accurate to suggest that the coveted spot you've earned with clients now paves the way for potential new innovation partnerships going forward?

**PK:** Definitely. Our clients are paying much more attention to the innovations we bring to the table. These are serious engineering solutions to a number of challenges everyone is facing and they are treated seriously. So, here we are - a technology company that has already proven itself to be taken very seriously, yet young enough (both as a company and one that employs many young engineers) to be unafraid to 'think out of the box' - which, in turn, allows us to bring all kinds of innovations to the industry.

**GMP&A:** Any comments concerning energy savings and associated costs?

**PK:** Sure. Forglass has been working relentlessly for several years now to research, test and implement technologies that are geared toward reduction in energy consumption and emissions. We introduced three such technologies at Glasstec last year. Now we're in advanced talks with some great, brave investors that are willing to join us in decarbonising glass production. That said, we'd like to see other courageous investors from companies worldwide who will join us in this effort. Obviously, any exposure in this industry must be carefully managed. However, progress toward a better and cleaner future inherently involves courage.

Basically, we've done our homework and the question we want to ask now is simply: Who's in?

**GMP&A:** Piotr, can you speak to any post Glasstec issues and evaluations or market prospects for 2023?

**PK:** As for Glasstec, we had a fantastic trade show! We arranged many serious meetings in advance - so our engineers were able to spend some unhurried time with clients. There was a lot of interest in our innovations, which we presented in short, animated films that were shown in a mini-cinema. As a marketing tool, Glasstec is invaluable for us - which is why our market prospects for 2023 look very good! Now, added to trade shows, we have representatives in Mexico that cover the entire Central American region - and in Italy too. ■

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