

A photograph of a male worker in a blue denim cap with 'Honduras' written on it, a white t-shirt, and blue overalls. He is wearing white work gloves and is focused on adjusting a long, thin metal rail on a complex industrial machine. The machine has various rollers, guides, and pneumatic cylinders. To the right, a wooden crate filled with white plastic bags is visible. The background shows more of the factory environment.

**PLANT  
TOUR**

# New Changes Ahead at Nu-Air

## Florida Manufacturing Operation

Poised for Even  
Further Growth

by Tara Taffera

Calixto Ponce machines top and bottom rails for the NuAir 500 series sliding glass door.

**A**t Tampa's Nuair Manufacturing, the aluminum door and window manufacturing operation has grown by leaps and bounds. But that doesn't stop the company from successfully manufacturing thousands of units per year. With double-digit growth last year, the company projects 50 million dollars in 2006. And with a more-than-robust Florida market, and planned expansions into other states and other materials, that number is sure to keep rising.

## History

Yes, this 60-year-old company is definitely on the map. In fact, when President Bush searched for a company to host an economic town hall meeting in February 2004 he chose Nuair. It has definitely come a long way since Kenneth "Jack" Horner founded this family-owned company in a West Tampa beer warehouse in 1946 with a mere \$7,000 initial investment. Today, Horner's daughter Connie serves as CEO, and two of Horner's grandsons, Ray and KC serve as vice president of information technology and vice president of special projects respectively.

But that doesn't mean Horner, at 87 has retired—in fact he still remains actively involved as chairperson. He says he has always believed in putting the customer first.

"Doing the right thing for your customer is essential to success in any business," he says.

This is why, throughout the aluminum embargo during the Korean war, Horner replaced aluminum jalousie louvers with glass. The decision was so popular that the company later added awnings, single-hung windows and horizontal roller windows, along with sliding glass doors.

In the early 1960s, Horner purchased Barrington Corp., a Georgia manufacturer of storm doors and windows. Part of this division was later sold but the Buford, Ga., production plant was retained. Today, that plant employs approximately 35 people.

As Nuair continued to grow it moved to a new 89,000-square-foot manufacturing facility in 1977 and in 2000 added another 38,500 square feet including warehouse space for shipping, 13 truck bays and offices for the installation, service and order entry departments. Today, the company's corporate offices and primary manufacturing plant occupy 190,000 square feet of space. Nearly 500 employees work at its main facility.

Nuair offers more than 250,000 door and window products. One of its most popular is the NuImpact™ line of impact-resistant doors and windows featuring laminated glass with a clear KeepSafe Maximum™ PVB interlayer made by Solutia. The company's 900

Series single-hung window is one of its top sellers as the plant produces 400 of these per day. The plant manufactures 850-1,000 units per day on average. Most of its products are distributed through a network for more than 100 distributors throughout Florida, the Caribbean and Central and South America.

## Installations

One factor that sets Nuair apart from its competition is that it performs its own installations in the Tampa Bay area.

"We have an InstallationMasters™ certified instructor on staff," says company president Scott Henderson. "Our employees do the installations. We train them."

Henderson is a strong believer in the InstallationMasters program and says Nuair has helped the building trades in Florida understand the importance of installing a window properly.

"We call on architects, builders and dealers. Four years ago we would walk into a builder's office and promote all the things we do to ensure a proper installation, use of flashing, tape, etc., and they would reply, 'How much will that cost?' Now builders are coming to us as the experts on flashing and proper installation proving that we were effective in getting our message across about the importance of proper installations," says Henderson.

The company was so effective that, even in the wake of numerous hurricanes in 2004 and 2005, very few problems were due to windows.

"We received calls from every person who had a water leak [following hurricanes of recent years]," says Henderson. "We found that less than 2 percent were window problems."

Nuair is very focused on installations—so much so that it has a separate company set up for installation sales.

"Mixing installed sales with dealer sales would have been a disaster," says Henderson. "They are distinctly different."

## Safety/Lean Manufacturing

As with any plant, there are also intricacies involved with manufacturing processes. Mike Curtner, plant supervisor, stresses that when it comes to manufacturing, safety is at the top of the list.

The company hired a safety director in the past year and according to Henderson, "this has made a tremendous change." In fact, the company just posted 90 days with no lost time, for which employees were rewarded with bonuses for this achievement.

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**—Scott Henderson, Nuair president**

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# PLANT TOUR



Nuair employees work on the impact glazing line for its Series 9000 single-hung window.

All of these changes mean adjustments for employees and Curtner adds, “a cultural change is not as easy as it sounds.”

## Equipment Investments

At Nuair the company has a wide variety of equipment—both new and old.

And if any equipment has problems, the company has an in-house maintenance and tooling department to help take care of any issues.

The plant is divided into two wings: East and West. The West Wing is where raw extrusion are received and warehoused. The company uses two major aluminum suppliers—Metal Industries and Profile Extruders.

They know how important safety is to plant management. In fact, once a week, the team leaders, including safety and quality control directors, meet with plant workers.

“The first topic discussed at every meeting is safety,” says Curtner.

Another topic given high priority at Nuair is lean manufacturing of which Curtner says, “we are big believers.”

This is evident when walking through the plant with Curtner and hearing him describe how he would like to reflow some areas, etc. to make them more efficient.

“Our facility isn’t set up to be as lean as we like,” he adds. “Through the years we have outgrown our facility and the additions have limited us somewhat.”

One example of this is the company’s impact patio door production. Curtner is planning on changing the layout of this area and adding two lift assists to aid plant workers in handling the heavy glass.

He adds, “I’m a firm believer in one-batch flow as this utilizes raw material best.”

Nuair is also looking at new ways of scheduling and developed a software system in house recently to help aid in streamlining production.

“With our new software system I can search by product line,” says Curtner. “It checks the glass for all products in-house and shows that we have all the components.”

The company is working toward a master scheduling program that will offer advanced coordination.

“We won’t stock the glass if we don’t have the frames for it,” says Curtner.

Nuair’s quality control team performs incoming inspections on all raw materials. The saw department then cuts the extrusions to the required lengths.

Some of the newer equipment includes an Erdman glazing table purchased this year. “We like this because it allows us to go at our own speed and offers controlled backbedding,” says Curtner.

The company counts on both Westshore and Oldcastle for its tempered and laminated glass. It also purchased a new optimizer from Billco recently. Curtner says this “cuts faster” than the previous machine used.

“This will also allow us to cut glass that we are currently purchasing,” he adds. “Anything that will save us space will help us.”

But the company isn’t done purchasing equipment.

“We need to invest some money into a new bender.”

Curtner says he is also looking at changing to a two-part silicone or hot-melt glazing for its impact product line.

“Since these won’t have to cure this would save time,” he says.

In the company’s insulating glass department, there are two IG lines. Nuair uses TruSeal’s Swiggle spacer, 3M’s Accentrim film machine for shapes and Besten presses which Curtner says “give excellent consistency.”

Once the products are manufactured they move to the East end of the plant where finished products are staged for dealers and installers. With demand so high in Florida, the company recently added four more

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trucks and additional dock space.

Curtner sums up the window market in the Southeast, and Florida in particular, simply: “Demand far exceeds supply.”

## Employee Retention/Expansions

And with such a demand for product, it is crucial to keep things running smoothly and that means finding and keeping good employees—a challenge in any market.

“I’m trying to pay for performance,” says Curtner. “When they come to the door I want them to have a career path.”

Curtner focuses on cross-training workers so if an employee is out, another can move over to that task.

“We’re rewarding those who are cross trained,” he says.

Nuair also hired a human resources director recently to make sure employees receive the right amount of training.

“We are investing in our facilities as far as lighting, equipment, etc., for example, making sure it is cool in the summer. We are doing all the things that will make employees want to come to work.”

Ensuring employees come to work may be a challenge but ensuring growth in the Florida home market is not.

“People are coming here to retire,” says Curtner. “There is no limit right now.”

Unfortunately, in terms of space, Nuair has reached its limit as there is no more room for expansion. Thus, the company has purchased property recently for another operation to be located within 10 minutes from the current plant. Curtner says this growth could evoke mixed feelings in Nuair workers.

“We have employees who have been here for 15-20 years. For them to see the company go through such rapid growth is both exciting and scary.”

And this level of expectation and excitement will only increase as Nuair is set to expand into a whole new product line.

“We know energy will play even more of a role in the years to come,” says Henderson. “We would like to expand in the Southeast but can’t meet energy codes with our current aluminum products—vinyl will allow us to do that.”

With the addition of a new material and expansions into other states, one thing is certain—the company is poised for exponential growth. ■

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