

Putting it all together: Interstate Assembly builds to customer specs



Al Olson is branch manager of Interstate Assembly, a company that assembles drive train components for transportation equipment manufacturers. Dave Wallis / The Forum

Industrial music created by the rat-a-tat-tat of impact wrenches harmonizing with the whirr of handheld grinders plays all day at Interstate Assembly in West Fargo.

Workers assemble drive train components – engine/transmission modules, cooling systems, axles, tires, wheels, hoses and other items – for equipment manufacturers across the country.

Projects range from assembling components for skid-steer loaders, industrial and agricultural vehicles, intermodal rail transporters, snowmobiles, power generators and mobile ground heaters to complete transit bus assembly.

“They give us a bill of materials. We order the parts, put it together and give them a shipping schedule,” said Al Olson, branch manager for the facility at 525 12th Ave. N.

“We don’t manufacture anything,” he said. “We only assemble. The niche for our business is that I build to our customers’ specifications.”

Interstate Assembly Systems, a division of Interstate Companies based in Bloomington, Minn., opened in 1993. It moved to its current 80,000-square-foot plant in 1995.

The local branch started with four employees assembling a couple of engines per day, Olson said.

Interstate Assembly now employs about 80 people, depending on work contracts, he said.

“We go year-around. We don’t slow down,” Olson said. “We haven’t slowed down in five years, and we have no intention to.”



Forklifts scurry through the assembly plant loading five to six semis that transport products daily.

“This area builds engines. Nine a day come off the line,” said Olson, walking past bright red, 335-horsepower Cummins diesel engines to which Allison hybrid transmissions are attached.

Employee Rick Taskinen grips the handle of a torque

wrench while attaching muffler tank hose ends on a 280-horsepower turbo diesel engine.

He’s been working for the company for about nine months.

Parked in a nearby aisle are 27 carts filled with axle parts. “That’s one day’s business,” Olson said.

Clipboard in hand, 10-year employee Rick Kane completes a final inspection of finished product before it is loaded and shipped. “He will go through and make sure all things are done right,” Olson said.

Most employees are company-trained. “I started building engines and then went over to building radiators,” Kane said.

He returned to school for computer training about five years ago, before being promoted to production supervisor for five departments: axles, hoses, radiators, engines, tires and air tanks.

Local training pays

Olson, a 1972 Barnesville (Minn.) High School graduate, received a degree from Minnesota Technical College Moorhead’s diesel mechanics program in 1974.

“My dad was a mechanic at Kiefer Chevrolet. It was kind of bred into me,” he said.

Olson spent seven years working in the Twin Cities. “I got sick of living in Minneapolis. I just made up my mind I was coming back home,” he said.

He started working for Interstate as a night shift mechanic in 1981, before being promoted to foreman and service manager.

“I made up my mind that I was going to make a career of working for them,” he said. “It’s been a very positive choice.

“We’ve grown every year,” he said. “We hope to continue to expand in Fargo-Moorhead.”

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