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Robert Francis

**President and general manager, Ranor Inc., Westminster
CEO ONE ON ONE**

Ranor Inc. manufactures precision metal components and equipment for industries ranging from energy and medical to defense and aerospace. Robert A. Normandin Sr. founded the company in 1956 in Fitchburg, and it remained a family-owned business until the late 1990s. TechPrecision Corp. of Central Valley, Pa., bought the company in 2006. Mr. Francis joined Ranor last February as its president and general manager, after spending 27 years in manufacturing, particularly aerospace. Ranor employs 155 people.

Ranor touts on its website that it can “deliver turnkey components for challenging applications.” Can you describe what you mean by that?

“We have some very unique capabilities to do very large metal forming and sheeting, large and heavy, primarily steel components. Forming, welding and machining are the three primary capabilities and with the types of certifications that we have in the nuclear markets and defense, and with our welding certifications in those areas. We are also ISO (International Standardization Organization) certified. We're capable of taking a customer's design and building the entirety of a structure. We're also capable of working with a design concept, both with some existing staff here as well as some subcontract talent, depending upon the specific engineering that we would need, and work with the customer to fully develop their design and then again build out an entire system. I think the best example of that is in what we call the medical market, and we have a customer that delivers a proton beam therapy system to hospitals, and that system requires a very extensive structure in order to carry the beam to the patient, and that structure basically needs a building that's approximately 20 yards by 30 yards, and we build all the structure that goes inside of that.”

How has the business changed over the years?

“Under TechPrecision, we have driven more toward product solutions, turnkey solutions and things that are actually going to have some longevity to their product life. The business, under family ownership, would take in job-shop types of jobs, where there might be just a one-off, you go build a portion of a system for someone. You might do it one time. You might do it a couple of times. Our focus has really been to work within the markets where we feel we bring a lot of value to, and within those markets develop with customers' products and solutions that we will make repetitively, whether repetitively means we make three or four a year, we make 10 a year, or whatever. We won't just make one piece and never see that product again. So that, I think, has been a major change to the business strategy under TechPrecision. And then beyond that, I think we employ continuous improvement techniques and philosophies here and try to drive the organization to be as competitive as possible.”

How does Ranor stand out from its competitors?

“Capabilities are certainly one thing. The size of things that we can do and that we can handle and the types of certifications we have all fit into what I call a capability window. But then you take our engineering expertise and our floor — both fabrication shop and machine shop — expertise. We really bring a very unique capability to the marketplace, and because of that, we're competitive. But you always have to be cost-competitive, too, and that is something we work on continuously to try to be as efficient as possible when we build products and quote products for customers. We also look for ways to be most cost effective with both things we buy and how we do things.”

Ranor serves different industries, including power generation, medical and defense. Where do you see the growth among these industries?

“First of all, the medical market — we have just signed a five-year, long-term agreement with our primary customer in the medical field. They are the ones that do the photon beam therapy. We just signed that at the beginning of this year. They

have an extremely good growth profile, and that just trickles down to our business, so that portion of our business — the medical — is already secure, and we have a good five-year growth profile.

“With the defense world — although defense has been as always under federal budget scrutiny, and there is every indication that is going to continue and in fact get worse in the short term — the market that we primarily play in is in the submarine area, and submarines actually have a shelf life, meaning that we do have to replace them, and those replacements are going to be needed in the next decade. Because of that, submarine funding will not only continue, it will probably escalate over the next few years, and we do several different parts on the submarines in the defense market. So that is also a growth market for us.

“In the nuclear market, there aren't a lot of nuclear plants that are going up in the United States. But there are some, and we do service a couple of customers in that market, and that will be potentially some growth, but certainly steady work over the horizon. We also have one particular customer that we make a radioactive waste transport cask (for), and that transport cask is a new design. There has not been new design in that industry for decades, and we are the only ones that have made it for our customer.”

Compiled by correspondent Brian Boyd

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