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American Power Systems: Local company, global impact

By Jan Touney
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Only a small sign with a red, white and blue logo gives away the identity of the company – American Power Systems Inc. (APS) – that occupies the building at 426 W. Second St. in downtown Davenport.

Yet the reach of this local business, founded in 2006 by local engineer and entrepreneur Thomas K. Evans, extends to almost every continent around the globe.

“We really do keep kind of a low profile; that’s how we operate in general,” said Amy Lank, the company’s president and CEO, who took over management of APS in 2013 after Mr. Evans, her husband, died following a two-year battle with brain cancer.

American Power Systems designs and manufactures advanced mobile power systems, alternators, converters, regulators and power generators for a variety of vehicles, including armored, security, commercial, marine and specialty vehicles such as RVs and luxury motor coaches. APS products are in demand for everything from military vehicles overseas to mobile newsrooms, command vehicles, medical units and utility bucket trucks.

And while the COVID-19 lockdown in 2020 proved to be a major struggle for many companies, “since we provide systems for government security entities, we were deemed essential so we were open the entire time,” Ms. Lank said. APS also already had processes in place to have teams working remotely – another plus.

APS products also met the well-documented surge in demand for luxury RVs and their attendant power needs as travelers hit the road without worrying about crowds or restrictions in commercial travel and accommodations.



Aaron Ransavage, an assembly and test technician with American Power Systems, assembles alternators in APS’ manufacturing facility headquartered in downtown Davenport. CREDIT AMERICAN POWER SYSTEMS

“We weathered it very well,” Ms. Lank said of the pandemic. “We came out of it as best as we possibly could.”

It all begins in Davenport

All of American Power Systems’ products are designed at the company’s Davenport facility, according to Ms. Lank.

“We work with strategic partners to have components manufactured for us to meet our specifications, but we do all of our assembly and all of our testing here in Davenport,” she said.

Demands for increased power needs for commercial and military vehicles have contributed to steady growth for the company.

“Year-over-year, APS is a multi-million-dollar revenue company with hundreds of customers and end users across the globe,” Ms. Lank said. “To date, APS products have been used on more than

10,000 vehicles across multiple continents, including Africa, Asia, the Americas, Europe and Australia.”

The company’s latest achievement was the launch in November of four new high-output alternator upgrades for the Toyota Land Cruiser 300. In announcing the new offerings, APS noted in a news release the Toyota Land Cruiser platform’s reputation “for reliability, durability, and off-road performance, making it a popular transportation choice in rugged environments.”

The Land Cruiser 300 Series is manufactured in Japan and available only outside the United States.

New project with Toyota

The APS announcement was received “very well,” Ms. Lank told the QCBI in an interview in mid-January. “We’ve already gotten a lot of inquiries. We’ve shipped

out several units to customers overseas even for testing purposes to see how it will work in the applications they're looking for.

"The fact that we were able to go in there and develop a system for the 300 was imperative to us being able to build upon our tradition of providing these kinds of quality products to our customers," she said.

APS, whose team of 15 employees has more than 300 years of cumulative experience in their respective areas, touts its extensive research and testing process.

"One of the things that sets us apart from other companies who do similar things is that we will get out there and get hands-on with our customers," Ms. Lank said. "We really pride ourselves in how we develop the product with our



AMY LANK

customer, starting from the beginning and understanding the needs they have and developing a product with them

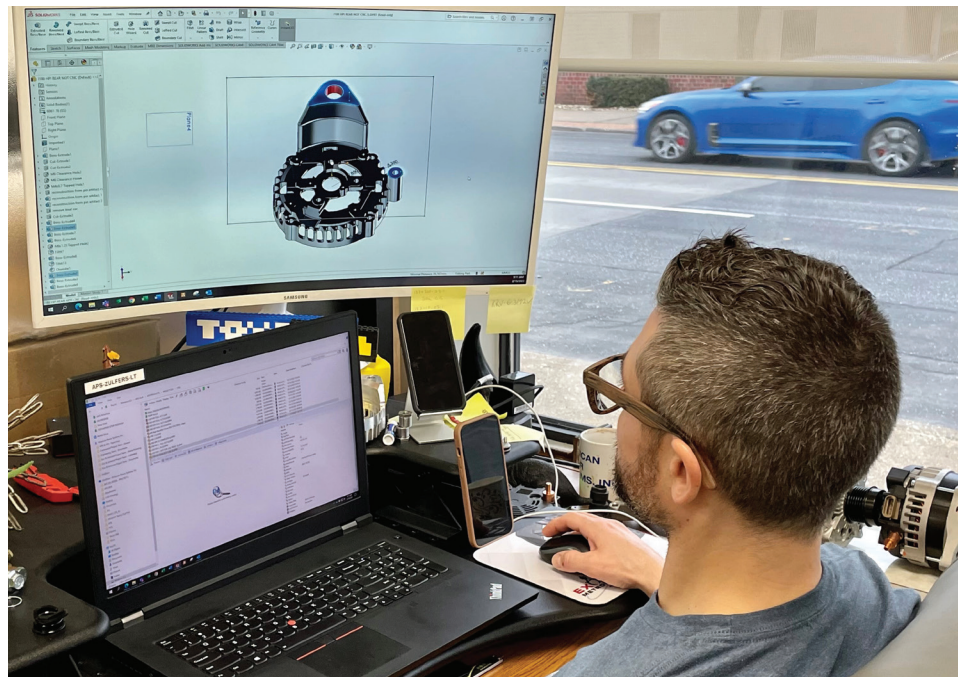
and then going out and getting onsite and being there to witness any testing that they need

to do with our product and provide any support that we can." The company's testing procedures were recently highlighted in a blog post on the APS website, www.americanpowerinc.com. "During the product development phase, APS uses what is known as a 'saturated dwell' test." This process more closely simulates real-world use conditions and more accurately predicts real-world, on-vehicle product performance, according to information from Greg Yerington, principal director of engineering for APS.

Global reach grows

APS has grown its global reach through the help of government export programs and was named the 2020 Small Business Exporter of the Year for the State of Iowa as well as the Region 7 Office of the U.S. Small Business Administration. The region encompasses Iowa, Kansas, Missouri and Nebraska.

APS team members have attended trade missions and trade shows across the globe and will be going to Tokyo in March to attend DSEI Japan (Defence and Security Equipment International). The conference is described on the DSEI



APS Mechanical Engineer Zach Ulfers works on a CAD drawing for a client. The APS team works hand-in-hand with clients to develop systems that meet critical power demands. PHOTOS BY AMERICAN POWER SYSTEMS

website as "providing unprecedented levels of access into the Japanese and wider Asia-Pacific market."

"Although we may be small, we fly our program managers all over the world," Ms. Lank said, noting she is grateful for assistance provided to APS from state and local economic development agencies.

"I'm always thankful to be an Iowa business," she said. "I think between our state and our community, there's a lot there for us between the Iowa Economic Development Authority (IEDA) and our Quad Cities Chamber."

According to trade statistics from the IEDA, 82% of the companies that exported from Iowa locations in 2019 were, like APS, small- and medium-sized companies with fewer than 500 employees.

Peggy Kerr, team lead of the International Trade Office for IEDA, said she considers American Power Systems "one of the poster children" for companies that approach growing their international business very strategically by taking advantage of programs offered by IEDA.

Ms. Kerr noted that IEDA has a variety of programs and resources for Iowa exporters.

"So part of it is to assess where they are in the export process, and then determine which of those tools is best suited for them," she said.

Asked about the strengths of a local company like APS in expanding its glob-

al presence, Joseph Rude, IEDA's international marketing manager, said APS has a strong product line and a strong team of employees.

"And then they have a growth mindset and they're globally aware," he said.

APS has participated in trade missions with IEDA, the most recent in the fall to southeast Asia. Prior trade mission trips facilitated by the International Trade Office were to South Africa and Mexico, Ms. Lank said.

"Being globally trusted starts with the ability to be global ... and the IEDA has been a big factor in helping us achieve that goal," she said.

APS also works with the Center for Industrial Research and Service (CIRAS), based at Iowa State University, Ames.

"We rely on CIRAS for guidance and low-cost programs for cybersecurity, government contracting and even manufacturing support with grants they receive from the U.S. government," said Ms. Lank, who has served a term on the CIRAS Industry Advisory Board. The board, comprised of representatives from a multitude of industries statewide, provides advice to CIRAS leadership.

A community-minded company

At the time of Mr. Evans' death almost 10 years ago, the company was "starting to take off, businesswise," Ms. Lank said.

"I felt a very strong drive to continue what we had been doing," she said. "I felt a stronger drive than ever."

Her work in growing the company has been recognized. Ms. Lank, a native of East Moline and 2001 graduate of United Township High School, was honored by the Technology Association of Iowa (TAI) in 2017 as the winner in the Entrepreneurial Innovation and Leadership category at its 10th annual Women of Innovation awards. She also

was a finalist in the TAI's Leadership Innovation category.

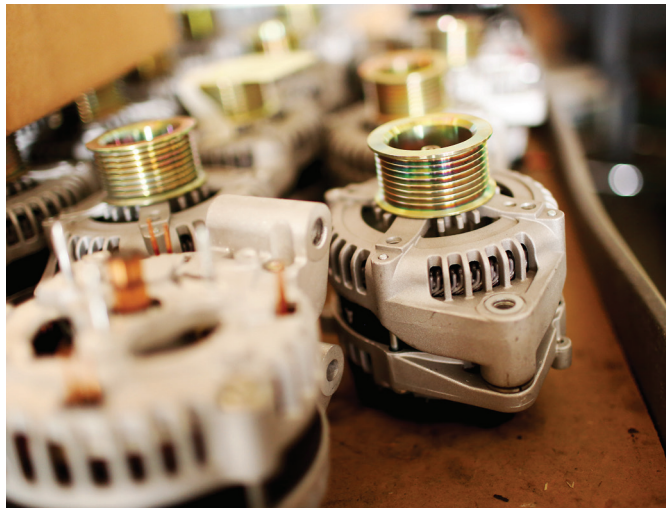
She is committed to supporting young people and honors Mr. Evans' legacy through the annual Thomas K. Evans Memorial Scholarship, a \$5,000 award for entering college students pursuing education in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM).

"Our scholarship is really something special to us," Ms. Lank said. "It's a blessing to be able to share that with students

and to help further their career."

This year, APS also is sponsoring the Quad City Engineering & Science Council's annual STEM celebration. Other organizations APS has supported with an emphasis on youth include Make-A-Wish Iowa and Project Renewal.

"The causes that are close to our heart are the bright lights of the future and connecting those kids with resources to help them be very successful," she said. **QCBJ**



APS specializes in high output alternators for armored and security vehicles, commercial and fleet vehicles such as coaches and work trucks, and marine vessels for cruising and racing. APS recently was one of the first manufacturers worldwide and only Midwest company to develop four new high output alternator power upgrades for the new Toyota Land Cruiser 300, Toyota's latest version of the popular platform.

APS helping grow next generation



TAYLOR MAYHUE

Iowa State University freshman Taylor Mayhue said receiving the \$5,000 Thomas K. Evans Memorial Scholarship in 2022 has been "life changing" for her.

The graduate of North Scott High School, who is carrying a double major in food science and agricultural education and is employed at ISU Dining, said the award from American Power Systems Inc. (APS), has

meant she hasn't had to "overexert myself to make it." It also has allowed her to be able to attend meetings such as the National FFA Convention & Expo in Indianapolis that are important to her future goals.

"My freshman year has been great," she said.

Ms. Mayhue praised APS President and CEO Amy Lank

for her commitment to young people.

"She is definitely making a place for women in STEM (science, technology, engineering and math)," Ms. Mayhue said. "It's a really great scholarship program. Amy Lank and APS really care about their school winners."

Applications are now being taken for the 2023 Thomas K. Evans Memorial Scholarship, which is named in honor of the local engineer and entrepreneur who founded APS in 2006. It is open to new college entrants pursuing education in STEM. The deadline to apply is noon, Monday, Feb. 27. To be eligible, a student must be graduating in 2023 from a school located in Bettendorf, Davenport, East Moline, Eldridge, Moline, Pleasant Valley or Rock Island.

For more information on the application process and required submission downloads, visit the APS scholarship page at www.americanpowerinc.com/about/scholarships/.

– Jan Touney