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DAILY EDITION**

October 31, 2008

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Power trip pays admirably for local entrepreneurs

By TOM ADAMS
Rochester Business Journal

Converting AC to DC leads to large contracts

Mark Miller started MaeTec Power Inc. in the spring of 2003 as a part-time venture, selling used equipment to telecommunications customers.

Nearly four years later, it is his full-time occupation, with nine full-time employees, nearly \$2 million in revenues and plans to double employment by the end of the year. MaeTec's long-term plans call for \$5 million in sales within two years and \$10 million in five years.

The Perinton-based firm provides sales, service and installation nationwide to telecommunications, data center and utility and commercial customers with direct-current power applications. DC power involves electrical currents that flow in one direction. Alternating currents reverse directions in an electrical circuit at regular intervals.

"We install DC power plants that convert the AC to DC and run their equipment," Miller says. "They run their switches, their routers, anything they have inside their facility.

"We also have large battery systems that provide backup power in case power's ever lost."

Miller, 36, is the company president. James Allen, 36, is vice president. Graduates of Palmyra-Macedon High School, Miller and Allen began their professional collaboration while working for a Syracuse-based energy provider years ago.

Miller invested \$25,000 in 2004 to get MaeTec Power off the ground, including the purchase of equipment. He ended the year



with \$100,000 in sales but unsure of a direction for the company.

He was approached by Allen, who was interested in working with Miller. The two put together a business plan to become a provider of DC power equipment. They are equal partners, Miller says.

A resident of Gananda in western Wayne County, Miller is responsible for company finances. Allen, of Pittsford, handles operations.

"We knew there was a significant risk," Allen said. "We entered the (telecom) marketplace after it really started crashing, but we knew there was business out there.

"We knew we could go in there and be competitive."

Miller's first job after graduating from SUNY College at Brockport was with a DC power firm in Syracuse. He filled a variety of roles, from managing projects and sales to collecting overdue payments.

Miller was among a group of J.M. Schaeffer workers that started another DC power provider, where he was reunited with Allen.

"It required a lot of travel," Miller recalls. "We supported customers all over the country, so we were road warriors, to say the least."

When Miller got married, he took a job selling batteries as a manufacturer's representative to stay closer to home. He then founded MaeTec Power.

"As a new company entering the marketplace during the downturn, we could base our costs on what the opportunities were then, not what they were during the boom," Miller said.

MaeTec Power has met revenue projections every year, he says.

"We're now at a point where we have a significant backlog of business, over the next four or five months, to sustain us and for us to grow," Miller says.

The firm has contracts with at least 20 primary customers, including Time Warner Inc., Cox Communications Inc., United States Cellular Corp., T-Mobile USA Inc. and AT&T Mobility LLC, which does business as Cingular Wireless.

The primary contracts have resulted in some 80 secondary contracts, Miller says.

"We've tied ourselves not only to telecom customers but to

manufacturers as well," he says. "With the equipment we install, a lot of times these high-profile customers have buying agreements directly with the manufacturer."

Along with Miller and Allen, two of MaeTec's full-time employees live in Upstate New York but travel extensively throughout the country. Other employees live in North Carolina, Florida and Missouri.

The company, which employed four at the beginning of 2006, expects to bring its work force to 18 by the end of the year.

MaeTec is looking for a range of workers, Allen says.

"You have highly skilled technicians, and we're also looking for entry-level guys who may have a little bit of experience in the industry," he says. "We put them through the necessary training to get them up to speed."

The company also plans to target customers in the Rochester area.

"We want to focus on penetrating that market in the next two years," Miller says. "We have this (national) segment of the business up and running.

"Hopefully, it's going to allow us more time to focus on pursuing those opportunities in the Upstate New York marketplace."

tadams@rbj.net / 585-546-8303

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