

SUSPA Inc. Adjusts to West Michigan

by Pat Matuszak
SBM

GRAND RAPIDS — If you ever feel like the pressure of modern living is forcing you into its mold, like a square peg into a round hole; you are not alone. Design engineers at SUSPA Incorporated of Grand Rapids, along with creators of ergonomic devices, have long been considering the ways modern industrial and office equipment cause the human form to adapt to a machine's parameters, instead of the machine being made to compliment human shape and movement.

SUSPA designs and manufactures gas cylinders that operate "ergonomic" equipment used in offices, factories, and homes. Applications include computer arms, desks, tables, chairs and car hatches that conform to human comfort parameters by changing height for different operators or working in ways that avoid stress to human muscles and joints.

"We like to call the equipment 'ergonomically considerate,'" said Director of Marketing Michael Dunlap. Height adjustable chairs began as a European novelty item, but have become the norm in offices throughout the United States. SUSPA designs and manufactures most of the gas cylinders used in adjusting office chairs worldwide.

"What is the first thing you do when you sit down on a new chair? I automatically reach for the seat adjustment," observed Dunlap. He noted that there was some initial resistance to the extra "frill" in American offices, but it soon became clear that ergonomically considerate equipment was not only more comfortable, but could save companies millions in lost manpower and workman's compensation suits. New innovations in office furniture use SUSPA's infinitely-locking gas cylinders for back and seat tilt functions and adjusting arms in computer table applications.

In the home and at work, people operating equipment are often required to bend, sit in awkward positions, and lift in inappropriate ways to accommodate the construction of machines. The more time spent working at these misaligned machines, the more repetitious the task; the more danger there is of

injury to the individual worker. One of today's leading concerns in employee injuries is carpal tunnel syndrome, which is caused in part by repetitious and/or incorrect movement. Even slight adjustments in equipment that correspond to the users height or actions can help prevent injury while increasing comfort, productivity and morale.

MOVOTEC Systems, a division of SUSPA, creates "Quick Ship" systems that can turn regular tables into adjustable tables that can be adapted to different uses and users. Product manager Douglas Hardy explained how the fluid drive lift systems can be easily installed and operated for weights of up to 750 pounds on level or tilt tables. They include bolt-on features that safely affix the equipment to cement flooring in factories.

With more companies embracing a mindset of regarding their employees as a valuable assets to be developed, comes more consideration of employees' needs both physically and psychologically. Improving working conditions has paybacks in both areas, causing employee satisfaction on both levels. Productivity increases as workers see their company as responsive to their needs and feel physically comfortable on the job.

SUSPA is involved in two other areas which utilize gas cylinders. They also produce gas spring cylinders for automobile hatchbacks, adjustable seats, and bumper struts for Volvo and other car manufacturers. Their friction dampers are used extensively in European washing machines, which have a horizontal axis as opposed to the American version which has a vertical axis. Because of this difference, their washing machine suspension business has been a cornerstone of their seven European factories, while their U.S. facility in Grand Rapids puts its focus on the other areas of gas cylinder usage.

The 110,000 square foot North American Headquarters on Roger B. Chaffee Drive was opened in 1974 and employs over 200 local workers. Other facilities are located in Germany, where the company began in 1950, and in Switzerland. SUSPA's parent factory in Altdorf, Germany, started by making suspension systems for mopeds and motorcycles as a division of Victoria Hercules Werke.

See SUSPA, page 25B

SUSPA

(continued from page 24B)

The name, SUSPA, stands for "suspend parts" which accurately describes the main function of the nitrogen-filled cylinders in their various applications to a wide variety of equipment. According to Dunlap, it also stands for the company's philosophy of "Participative Management" which encourages all of the "parts" of SUSPA's production "community" to give input that will benefit the team as a whole.