

## Listen Up: Sharpe redefines Value-

Since Sharpe's launch in suburban Chicago, Illinois in 1986, in addition to offering one of the most comprehensive valve product lines in our industry, including quarter-turn & multi-turn valves, along with automation & control options, Sharpe has evolved into a leading edge manufacturer and producer of highly engineered stainless and carbon steel ball valves.

Since the acquisition of Sharpe by Smith-Cooper International eight years ago, Sharpe has successfully expanded their range of services and products distributed around the world. In recent years Sharpe has expanded into engineered products that have critical applications.

Recently, the company has expanded significantly, moving from a 35,000-square-foot building into a new, state-of-the-art 130,000-square-foot warehouse, which includes a new 20,000-square foot state-of-the-art assembly, actuation, and testing department, along with an expanded engineering and administrative offices. This new location is expected to give Sharpe more room to support future growth initiatives, while allowing Smith-Cooper International to house their entire range of industrial PVF products, making this new facility a one-stop shop for all of the companies products.

Valve World Americas had the opportunity to visit Sharpe's new Chicago location to meet with President of Smith-Cooper International Bob Cooper, President of Sharpe Alex Winkler, Vice President Sales Shawn Mohon and Vice President National Sales Gary Skeber, to discuss Sharpe's immense growth, its new testing capabilities, the new API608 compliant valve and the importance of listening to its customers.



By Sarah Bradley

In recent years, Sharpe has not only expanded its presence in the United States, but has also moved into the international marketplace. While it is common to find Sharpe valves at work in major American plants, they are also widely accepted in Latin America, Canada, Europe, Asia and the Middle East. The full line of valves are used by companies of all types and sizes involved in manufacturing, chemical processing, pulp & paper, petroleum, power generation, food processing and more.

"We are trying to service the industry as best we can. We are uniquely diversified in what we are offering and in the industries that we service. We are trying to make sure that our valves can be approved in most industries around the world. I think the formula is diversification – by product, territory and industries. A wide range of Sharpe valves can be found in food, energy & chemical processing, along with control applications," explained Alex Winkler.

The company's commitment to diversification in products and industries is one of the ways Sharpe is able to focus on the needs of its customers. By ensuring that such a diverse range of products and en-



gineered solutions are readily available to customers across the globe, Sharpe is able to work with their distribution network and channel partners to develop and maintain strong client relationships. Sharpe is also noted for its technical quality, service by an experienced staff of valve specialists, technical support and readily available inventory that allows for prompt delivery while eliminating long lead times.

"Our philosophy is to always take care of the customer" which is why we have distribution centers in Los Angeles, Chicago, Atlanta, Texas and Vancouver. We have had to out-perform the older, more established valve companies in America. We have had to do it faster, better, and more economically than our competitors. Our inventory level has helped us gain a lot of recognition in the industry throughout the years, while our commitment to quality and customer service is driving the future of our business. We listen to the customer. We are small enough that we can react, but big enough that we can take care of business" said Gary Skeber.

Our company has a long history of offering superior customer service, with an emphasis on the branding of our products, along with superior logistical services designed to better meet the needs of our customers. Our distribution network in the USA has expanded in order to offer the best delivery option available to our customers,

including same-day will-call, one-to-two-day delivery, and quick turn-around actuation and testing services to support our customer's just-in time delivery needs.

### PRIME PRODUCTS

Though the company recognizes the importance of building relationships through maintaining close customer connections, the high-quality, diverse product line speaks volumes for itself. Sharpe valves are available in many product categories including stainless and carbon steel ball

valves; gate, globe, check and butterfly valves; and control valve packages, as well as Alloy 20, Hastelloy C, Monel and Brass. Sharpe valves can be custom made according to varying specifications, design modifications and special needs. This made-to-order service allows the company to ensure that it can offer clients an engineered solution for their specific qualifications and applications. The custom solutions also allow the company a great deal of flexibility in its inventory and ensures that lead times are reduced, as custom valves can be built from scratch in-house in a short period of time. Sharpe insists on listening to its customers and responding with the engineering capabilities it possesses to build a better product.

"We are heavily focused on the engineering. We have an engineering department in Chicago and we also do machining, assembly and testing here. Doing everything in-house gives us control, flexibility, it allows us to keep the price in line, gives purchasing power and we can ensure the quality," said Shawn Mohon. "We are so diversified that we don't only try to market and sell the items that we have on our shelves. We also try to come up with solutions for distributors and end-users. We have engineers in-house who will help end-users through distributors come up with solutions. Just because we don't



## Added by listening to the customer



stock it, doesn't mean we can't come up with a solution. Besides the number of different types of valves that we have to offer, we are still able to think outside the box to provide custom solutions."

Sharpe's new facility currently employs four full-time engineers and a person the company considers to be the premier quarter-turn engineer in the world whose full time job is to be concerned with new product development, which has led to many new products in the last few years, such as the API608 valves, wafer valves and the expansion of Sharpe's butterfly valve package. Sharpe stresses that research and development will play a key role in the company's future.

"We were in development for about three years on a new product. Our goal was to build the best ball valve in the world. We listened to end-users and our distribution network, and most of them came to us with similar requirements. API608 is a specification that is gaining a lot of strength, and it is all about developing a valve whose stem is strong enough so it doesn't break off in the valve. Most refineries and chemical plants want the stem made out of 316 stainless steel because of its corrosion resistance capabilities as opposed to 17-4. So, to accomplish this we built a completely new valve platform with an 800-pound ANSI class body to API608. It's also fire-safe to API607 sixth edition and it has an option to be built with an integral fugitive-emission body," explained Gary.

The new facility has provided the company with an assembly area in the warehouse that is double the capacity of the previous location, increasing the company's pro-

duction capabilities. The new space has also allowed for the addition of a new clean-room environment for assembling clean valves, a cryogenic test facility and a machine shop is to be added. With the expansion of Chicago's facility, Sharpe has been able to focus on developing many more engineered products and adding to its existing line of valve products.

As the company grew, Underwriters Laboratories recognized it with an ISO 9001 registration based on Sharpe's design and manufacturing of valves. The company has implemented a strong quality-control program and the addition of the new in-house testing capabilities have increased Sharpe's ability to further ensure that its customers are receiving the highest quality of products possible.

"We test the quality of all of our valves, whether it is commodity-type or engineered. We also have third parties overseas who go into our foundries and with whom we have had relationships for years. For anything we fabricate, the drawings go to our machine shops locally and when it



comes back, we have our quality-control department check the measurements. We hydro-test the welds, so they are 100 per cent tested. For cryogenic valves we use the clean room. We use our ultrasonic cleaner first, we clean and rinse the valves, and we bring them to the clean room and



let them dry. We have all the tools and everything that is in there is dedicated just for that room. We assemble them in there, we use nitrogen to test the valves, then we bag them, tag them, and ship them," explained Shawn.

continue expanding its presence in the industry and focus on catering to the needs of its customers, the company will stand by its mission to listen to its customers and take action to provide the best possible engineered solution.

"We are an old-age company, service-wise. We still believe that service is important. We still have people call and hold conversations; it is not all via email and faxes. We are listening to our customers and that is how we have grown our product offering. People want service. We didn't get to this stage in the industry by not listening. When you call us you get a person to talk to, who wants to listen to your needs and try to solve problems," explained Alex. "Service is people and service is inventory. You have to inventory quite a bit in order to properly service the customers. This is the nation that invented the microwave – give it to me now! This is the nation that developed FedEx and UPS – ship it today! If you ask for it today, you wanted it yesterday and you expect it tomorrow! And we want to be able to fill that need in the valve industry."

### THE FUTURE IS FRIENDLY

As the company continues to grow and evolve, we intend on maintaining a winning combination of Sharpe premier products and attentive customer service for its clients around the world. With plans to

"Sharpe/Smith-Cooper International is proud to offer our customers one of the most comprehensive inventories and range of services available in the world. Thank you," said Bob Cooper, President.

