

# VanAire: Your Independent Partner

Since the company's inception in the early 1990s, VanAire has continued to set the industry benchmark in Engineered Valve Automation Hardware (EVAH). With over 20 years in the business, the company's strong engineering, manufacturing and quality capabilities, have been recognized around the globe as the primary go-to source of many leading valve and actuator companies.

Valve World Americas had the pleasure of visiting VanAire's team in Gladstone, Michigan to meet with Mr. William VanDeVusse; President and CEO, Mr. Tony Lambert; VP of Valve Automation Software and Mr. Eric Miller; VP of Manufacturing to discuss VanAire's highly engineered products, the company's commitment to quality and the importance of investing in experienced personnel.



By Sarah Bradley

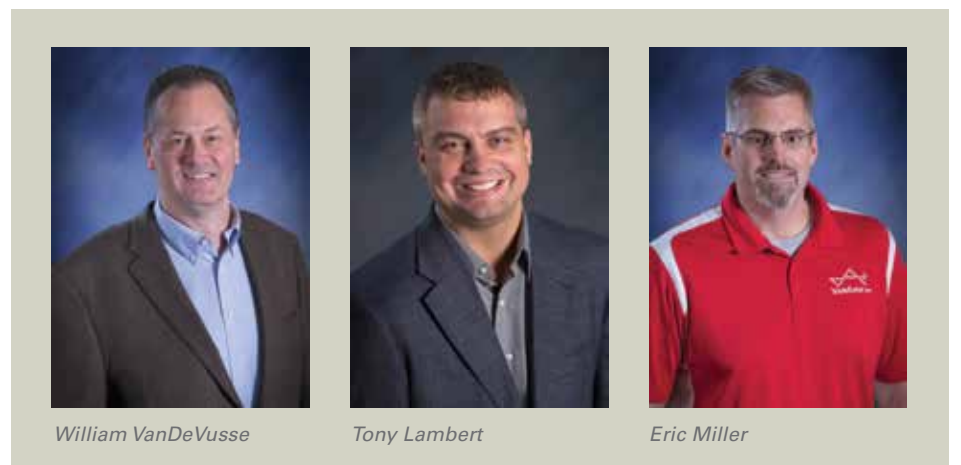
## Innovations in Engineering

Through working closely with customers and learning of their needs Richard VanDeVusse, a mechanical engineer working for a valve distributor, recognized a void in the industry and responded to a demand for a consistent, high quality, engineered product for mounting kits. Richard convinced his employer to begin manufacturing and took the opportunity to purchase the equipment when the company made a decision to refocus its business, and began to independently design and manufacture mounting kits. The company quickly expanded due to the ever-increasing demand for these critical EVAH components. Today, VanAire houses fifteen 3D CAD stations and over 30 CNC machines in their 45,000 square foot ISO 9001:2015 registered facility, including robotic welders, laser cutting systems, machining centers, turning centers, press brakes, blind hole keyseaters and robotic machine tenders.

While the mounting kit component is often overlooked as a commodity item,

sources indicate that a primary reason for premature valve failure can be attributed to inadequate mounting hardware. With this in mind, VanAire has used its immense experience, knowledge and engineering capabilities to help ensure that the automated valve assembly will withstand all known torques and loads carried during its predicted lifespan. Used in many different sectors including oil & gas, power, water & wastewater, chemical and pulp & paper, VanAire's kits can range in size from approximately one pound to well over half of a ton, due to the wide range of applications for the company's critical components.

"Our design standards and manufacturing practices are all tied to industry standards. We look at ANSI, AWS, ASME standards and make sure that we design and manufacture our products to these global, industry standards. This has helped us to deliver that consistent, high quality product that meets all of our customers' applications," explained Tony Lambert. "To understand why



William VanDeVusse

Tony Lambert

Eric Miller

standards are critical to us and the importance of adhering to them, you have to ask yourself why standards even exist. It is not just so things look the same; people want consistency, they want quality, but they also want the safety that goes along with that. If you do not design products to standards, you cannot ensure safety. You have standards on the valves and actuators, but now the industry is realizing how important it is to have standards on that connecting piece; the mounting bracket that connects these actuators and valves. It helps to ensure that the valve will last and perform as intended."

"Designing and manufacturing to the international standards differentiates us from our competition – our internal standards are already patterned after international standards, so we often say when we know we are quoting against our competition, to make sure you are comparing apples with apples. They may give you a chunk of metal that will indeed fasten the two components together, but is it really compliant with the standard? Does it really do what it is supposed to do? Is the quality there?" said Bill VanDeVusse.

## Culture of Quality

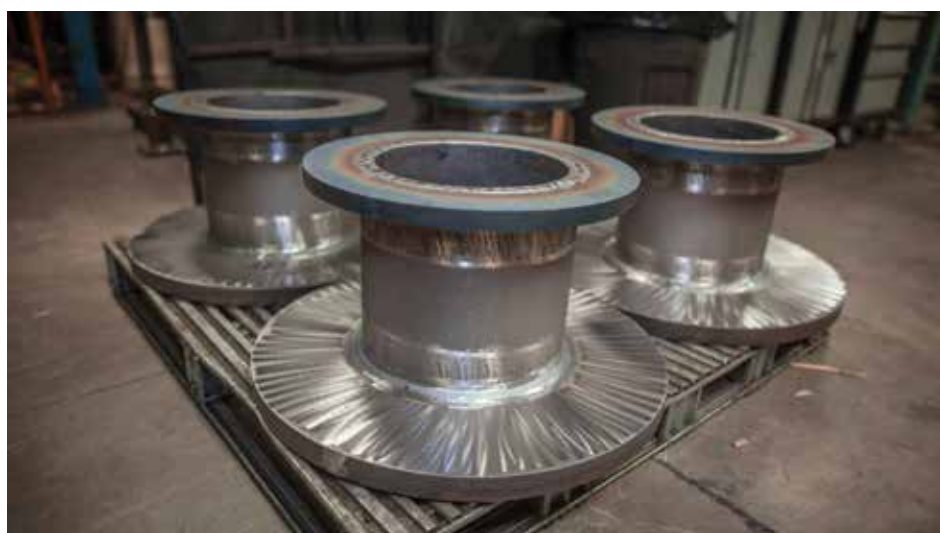
VanAire's ISO 9001:2015 certification is a prime example of the company's commitment to continual improvement – a road map VanAire is following to improve consistency in every aspect of the organization. The certification stan-

dards were initially adapted at the company's highest level and have since become part of the culture of quality that permeates through every aspect of the business. The company made the decision to implement the certification and its stringent requirements to the very core of their business.

Achieving ISO 9001 registration is also a major differentiating factor between VanAire and its competitors. "You will not find another independent valve automation hardware supplier in the world that has our capabilities under one roof and the strong understanding of this market. We are the only one that has the engineering expertise, the design expertise, manufacturing technology, the connection with ISO and other industry organizations. From a global standpoint you are not going to find another company that has everything under one roof as you have with VanAire," confirmed Tony. "We wanted to set the benchmark in this industry for quality engineered valve automation hardware."

Having uniquely positioned itself as an independent, full service provider dedicated to rotary valve mounting kits, VanAire's main objective is to provide their customers with the very best in quality, design, and delivery.

"One of our biggest focuses is not being the cheapest, but being the best. The standards that are written around the applications are created to protect your investment. Our core customers



# in Engineered Valve Automation



value the quality and place that at a higher importance than lowest price," Eric Miller revealed. "Our focus has always been on making kits that work and our customers are not interested in just booking the guy down the street who just built something with no guarantee that it is going to work properly or not cause damage. We consider all those intricacies to a valve and actuator and follow the standards to support it."

With the goal to be problem solvers for their clients, VanAire's in-house design and engineering capabilities mean that they are able to quickly adapt to meet customer needs and also provide the quality peace-of-mind made possible through controlling all aspects of the process from beginning to end. The company's commitment to quality and ensuring that they provide a consistent product is evident in every aspect of the process.

"We do not rely on too many outsourced operations. The plan from the beginning has been to manufacture all of our products here in-house. Having our manufacturing and our engineering in the same building certainly helps the output and consistency of the product. Having control of the product from start to finish is important and it helps us remain competitive," said Eric. "We are engineering it, designing it and manufacturing it here in-house, so our turnaround times are quick. If you build the quality into the part, you do not have to worry about whether or not it will pass the test of ISO quality and other industry standards. We control the process from start to finish and that gives us and our customers confidence in the products they receive."



## The People are as Important as the Product

VanAire attributes much of its success not only to the high quality products the company provides, but also to the quality customer service and immense expertise possessed by their team. The company believes in the importance of empowering their employees, supporting the community in which they work and building a sense of pride in the company culture.

"We empower our employees to go out and make a difference. Any company can write a check, but knowing that our employees are involved in the community and that we support local vendors and companies within the community is important to us. It is important to our employees as well, because this is where they live, where they work, where they have roots and we are glad they can feel a sense of pride in the company," said Bill. "The community is good to us by supplying us with good, hardworking people who see the bigger picture and are working together to reach that common goal."

Understanding the customers' needs is also vital to ensuring that the company provides a mounting kit that meets or exceeds the requirements of the application. VanAire's employees work closely with their clients to communicate their needs and help them to understand how different applications can drastically affect the design of a mounting kit.

"We ask the customer different questions to best understand their individual application needs. If it is severe service, if it is a high cycle application, high temp, high pressure or nuclear - we ask specific questions because understanding the application and communicating that up front is critical to making sure that valve assembly works as intended. We realize the importance of working with our customers to make sure that we give them a product that meets their demands," Tony said.

Though VanAire's product quality is evident through its proven reliability, the company has taken the market downturn as a positive opportunity to solidify its position as the leader in EVAH technology.

"We have been working to educate customers on the importance of differentiating the VanAire bracket from others. We prove to our customer base that it is worth the investment in quality. You do not have to worry about downtime, because when you get a kit from VanAire you know it is going to work as intended each and every time. That is what sets us apart," explained Tony. "The market downturn was a true test to our strategy. We considered compromising our standards to pursue a market that was only interested in cost savings, but in the end we won because we really set the bar by making sure that our customers knew that investing in our product was the right decision. Using a VanAire bracket makes our customers look good in front of their customers, because their valve and actuator assemblies last. You do not have to worry about a premature failure, about a valve leaking due to a flimsy bracket or a valve stem issue due to side loading,



because when you get a kit from VanAire it is engineered to perform for that application. People know if they want a high quality bracket to work with their application, to use VanAire."

This commitment to understanding the value of investing in quality product is an important lesson that VanAire not only wishes to introduce to their customers, but also to their employees. With two production shifts and over 75 employees, VanAire's team of dedicated, skilled and inspired employees are imperative to accomplishing the company's quality policy goals for exceeding customers' expectations.

"We try to instill in every person here that they are not just bending a piece of steel, they are not just turning a round bar - this is valve automation hardware. This is going to the valve industry and it is important to know why we use this material or why we maintain such high welding process standards and have a Certified Welding Inspector on our staff. We are trying to educate our entire team about what they are designing, about what they are producing, because it can help to control process in every industry out there. It is a mounting bracket that connects a valve to an actuator in the field all around the world and it serves an important function," stated Tony.

## The Future of Independence

VanAire recently announced that Steven Soderman has joined the company's leadership team as CEO and Quality Manager. Prior to coming to VanAire, Soderman spent 13 years with EMP, Inc. of Escanaba most recently holding the position of Corporate Director of Quality.

"Since becoming ISO 9001 registered in

2012, VanAire has chosen to integrate the roles of CEO and Quality Manager to ensure that our quality system delivers the best possible results," said Bill. "Steve's experience in quality and proven leadership skills are perfectly suited to this position and the company's long term needs."

The company also recently announced that Tony Lambert and Eric Miller have been added as owners of the company, joining Bill VanDeVusse who has owned the company since 2014. Tony has been with the company since 1996 and Eric joined VanAire in 1997. This expansion of ownership marks the first time in the company's 22 year history that it has not been owned entirely by a member of the VanDeVusse family.

"With mergers and acquisitions rampant within the valve industry, adding Tony and Eric as owners sends a strong signal that we believe VanAire can continue to best serve our customers as an independent partner. This move enhances VanAire's long-term commitment to our customers, our employees, and the community," said Bill. "Being an independent company means that we can give all our customers the same level of priority and the same level of service. We do not have to put orders that come in from one customer ahead of another one because we are affiliated or tied to them in some way. There are no second class customers here. Everybody gets the same priority treatment because we do not play favorites. We are free to meet all of our customers' needs. It also gives us the freedom to be more nimble and flexible in our decision-making and reaction time. It's all about having a great team, making smart decisions on a daily basis."

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the profiled company and do not reflect the position of Valve World Americas.