

VanAire Inc: Engin



VanAire has continued to set the industry benchmark in Engineered Valve Automation Hardware (EVAH) since the company's inception in 1995. With over 20 years in the business, VanAire's strong engineering, manufacturing and quality capabilities, have been recognized around the globe, making the company the primary go-to source of many leading valve and actuator companies.

Valve World Americas spoke with VanAire's team in Gladstone, in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. Steve Soderman; VanAire CEO and Quality Manager, William VanDeVusse; President, Tony Lambert; VP of Valve Automation Software and Eric Miller; VP of Manufacturing discussed VanAire's commitment to quality and manufacturing highly engineered products.

By Sarah Bradley

Richard VandeVusse, a mechanical engineer working for a valve distributor, recognized a void in the industry through working closely with customers and learning of their needs. In response to a demand for a consistent, high quality, engineered product for mounting kits, VanDeVusse convinced his employer to begin manufacturing. When the company made a decision to refocus its business, Richard took the opportunity to purchase the equipment and began to independently design and manufacture mounting kits. Due to the ever-increasing demand for these critical EVAH components, the company quickly expanded.

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.

VanAire's critical components are used in many different sectors including oil & gas, power, water & wastewater, chemical and pulp & paper. Due to the wide range of applications for VanAire hardware, kits can range in size from approximately one pound to well over half of a ton. While the mounting kit

component is often overlooked as a commodity item, VanAire has set out to inform the valve world that, sources indicate that a primary reason for premature valve failure can be attributed to inadequate mounting hardware. With this in mind, the company 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.

"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.

"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 compli-



William VanDeVusse Tony Lambert Eric Miller Steve Soderman

ant with the standard? Does it really do what it is supposed to do? Is the quality there?" said Bill VanDeVusse.

Lambert further explained the importance of adhering to industry standards and why this commitment to quality differentiates VanAire from other component providers. "To understand why 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. Our customers want to ensure they are doing everything they can to maintain uptime and have processes running when they are supposed to be running," he said. "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, because there were times in the past where valves failed and it looked bad on the manufacturer, but in reality it was an inadequate mounting bracket – it was too flimsy or it was not parallel or not concentric. All those things that, if not engineered correctly, can negatively impact the lifecycle of the valve."

A Culture of Quality is Key

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

"ISO 9001 provides us with the framework and set of principles that is not only a Quality Management System, but a Business Management System. Our quality polices ensure a common sense approach to the management of our organization to consistently satisfy customers and provide a basis for effective processes and effective people to deliver an effective product time after time," explained Steve Soderman.

The certification standards 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 and the connection with

Engineered for Strength

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 Lambert. "Our goal is 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 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.

"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 Miller. "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."

Educating the Industry

Understanding the customers' needs is also vital to ensuring that the company provides a mounting kit that meets the requirements of the application. VanAire works 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. Some of the same questions that the valve people ask the end user when they spec a valve can directly impact the design of a mounting kit. We realize the importance of working with our customers to make sure that we give them a product that meets their demands," Lambert said.

"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 Lambert. "Even in the downturn years, we held firm to our engineering standards, even though the upfront cost was higher than our competition and we had immense pressure to reduce our cost, even if it meant lowering our standards a little. However, we stayed true to our commitment to providing a product that the customers can count on and would save them money in the long run. The end result is that VanAire sales grew during those times, when others had declining sales."

This commitment to understanding the value of investing in quality product is an important lesson that VanAire not only brings 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 team-member here that they are not just bending a piece of steel, they are not just turning a round bar – this is Engineered Valve Automation Hardware and customer's come from all over the world to purchase the product you personally manufacture." 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 con-

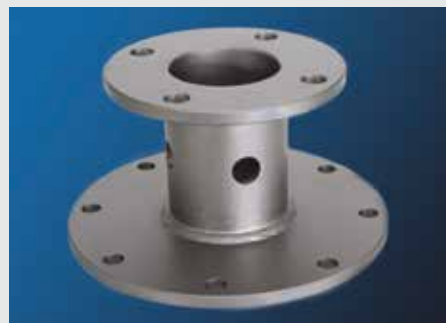
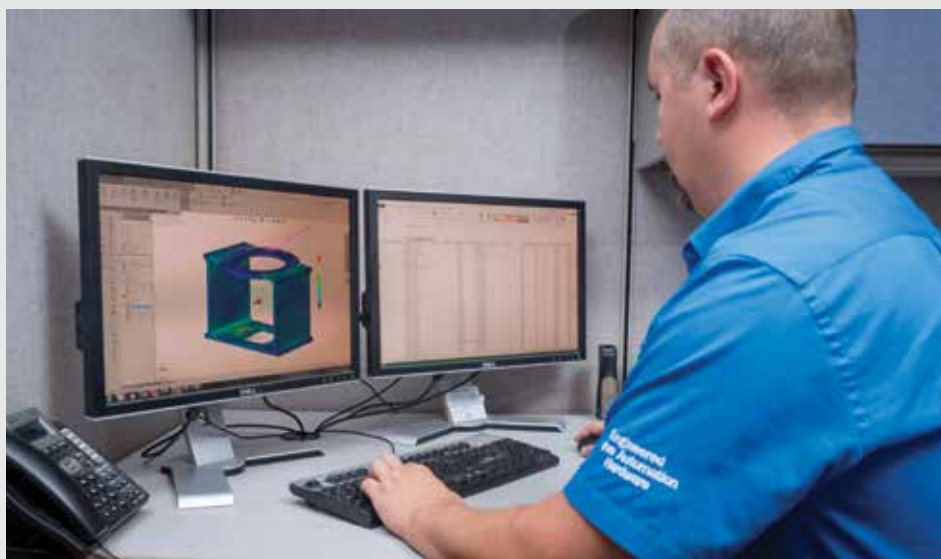
trol process in every industry out there. It is a mounting bracket that connects a valve to an actuator in the field all around the world and it serves an important function," stated Lambert.

The company's commitment to quality and ensuring that they provide a consistent product is evident in every aspect of the process.

"We work with companies that have different branches around the country and each branch does things their own way, yet they are trying to portray themselves as a unified company and try to make sure that the quality is consistent across all of these branches," said VanDeVusse. "We are able to be one source that can supply it nationwide, if not globally, to make sure that quality is consistent, that the look is consistent and as a result help to make sure their image as a company consistent in terms of quality and product as well."

The Future is Now

When asked about goals for the future, VanDeVusse held a positive outlook about the role VanAire will play in the industry. "Fortunately the optimism in the market is a huge growth plan right now. We have already seen sizable increases this year, over last year in the orders that have come in and in the bookings. We did a customer survey and 63% of our customers said they expect their business to be up significantly compared to previous years. Our growth plan is to continue to provide them the same level of service and quality product. We have some great relationships with some really great customers and we fully expect that they are going to take us with them into this more robust year and beyond," concluded VanDeVusse.



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