

Dayton Daily News

Henny Penny's growth tied to food industry's success

Eaton company expects \$150 million in sales this year.

By Thomas Gnau, Staff Writer - Updated 6:44 PM Saturday, December 3, 2011

EATON — Sales are cooking at Henny Penny Corp.

The manufacturer of cooking devices and food-storage equipment celebrated its top month for profit and revenue in August, its second-best month in September and its third-best month in October, Rob Connelly, Henny Penny president, said in an interview last week.

Annual sales have grown from \$120 million in 2009 to \$140 million in 2010. Connelly is confident growth will continue, hitting \$150 million this year. He expects double-digit percentage growth in 2012.

Also this year: Henny Penny hired 35 people — in engineering, product management, technical support and similar areas — and is still looking for the right people, the executive said. In 54 years, Henny Penny — developer of the first commercial deep pressure fryer that sped the cooking of chicken — has never laid off a worker, a rarity among Rust Belt manufacturers.

But Connelly also said the privately owned company is striving to maintain conservative expectations, especially in the wake of the Great Recession and continued weakness in Europe.

"I want to have a healthy paranoia," he said.

To that end, the company took advantage of a recent key retirement to restructure leadership positions, making a series of promotions and hires to position the company for the future.

Said Connelly: "We kind of took out a clean sheet of paper and drew up the organization that we think makes the most sense."

The company tries to measure its success by customers' success, he said. "We pride ourselves in kind of making it an overly simplistic formula," the president said.

Fast-food service chains like McDonald's, Wendy's, KFC and Chick-fil-A make up 70 percent of the company's business.

If you've recently had french fries at a newer McDonald's restaurant, chances are the fries were cooked in a fryer made in the company's manufacturing facility off U.S. 35 in Preble County.

When customers need Henny Penny's products and services, Connelly takes that as a good sign. For example, Chick-fil-A recently rolled out a spicy chicken sandwich that required a new pressure fryer from the company.

Jack Gridley, vice president of meat, seafood, deli and prepared foods for Dorothy Lane Market, said his company likes being able to do business with another Miami Valley firm. But more than that, Henny Penny's products simply work for DLM, he said.

DLM, which has three area locations, uses Henny Penny hot food merchandisers and a couple of the company's deep fryers.

"They put out a great line of products, and when we have a use for a certain category of products, we certainly go to them," Gridley said.

Contact this reporter at (937) 225-2390 or tgnau@DaytonDailyNews.com.

Source: <http://www.daytondailynews.com/business/henny-pennys-growth-tied-to-food-industrys-success-1293774.html>