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MonoSol expansion goes global for Merrillville-based firm

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By Carrie Napoleon, Post-Tribune correspondent

While consolidation and growth in the steel and banking industries have been widely reported, one Northwest Indiana company has been quietly growing in its own field.

[MonoSol LLC](#), a provider of water-soluble film with headquarters in Merrillville and a research and production facility in Portage, has purchased two European companies in two years and increased the number of patents it holds as it strives to gain an edge over its competition.

Water-soluble packing is a multimillion-dollar industry, according to company CEO P. Scott Bening, and foreign competition is relentless.

“Our patent portfolio is growing,” Bening said. “We are trying to patent anything and everything we can regarding our technology.”

In an effort to increase its international presence, MonoSol acquired Greensol S.A., based in Sens, France, in early March. In 2004 MonoSol merged with its largest competitor in England, Aqua Film. Now called MonoSol AF Ltd., that facility is located in Hartlebury, England.

With all MonoSol’s growth, there is the possibility of further expansion, both here and in England. Bening said the company is weighing the possibilities.

MonoSol now employs 137 people in the United States, including 90 members of Teamsters Local 142 and 40 degreed professionals, and another 50



Andrew Verrall (left), director of research and development, holds a product that is made into a water soluble film, a final product displayed by P. Scott Bening, president and CEO at MonoSol LLC in Portage. (Lisa Schreiber / Post-Tribune)

people in Europe. Of that number, 23 are manufacturing associates, 15 professionals and 12 support staff.

The company holds at least 12 patents with an equal number in the pipeline.

The most recent patent, awarded in February, concerns the M3030 film. This patent covered a new way to take the polyvinyl alcohol film the company manufactures for its water soluble packaging applications and makes it more affordable to a wider range of industries, Bening said.

"In some larger applications, companies can't afford to put money into the packaging," Bening said.

M3030 will primarily be used in the detergent and agrochemical industries. Through a unique formulation, MonoSol has added certain types of starch into the film that does not impact performance for those particular applications and reduces the cost of providing the film for larger packaging uses.

There is also a patent pending for TerraLock, another application of the company's core PVA product. TerraLock is a sprayable version of the product used for dust abatement.

"We have a solution of PVA formulated specifically for dust abatement," Bening said. MonoSol, through a defense contractor, is setting up a supply of the product in Iraq that will be used to reduce the dust blown up during helicopter landings.

The product also is being promoted for use in the construction industry on dirt roads in new developments. Once applied, it will reduce the dust generated by heavy equipment moving through an unpaved area and minimize the sediment that lands on the new construction.

Bening said along with TerraLock, MonoSol continues to pursue new uses for the polyvinyl alcohol film it has been making since the company was founded in 1953.

"We just launched a new edible soluble film made of cellulose," he said. Plans are to target the bakery industry with preproportioned packages for ingredients. The effort will help bakeries improve efficiency and cut costs.

Tom Yogan, director of innovations projects for MonoSol, said the company is unique in how it is able to work with its clients to develop products for their specific applications and that helps keep the company on the cutting edge. It does not want its

competition to have easy access to new applications.

“What we do with the water soluble film is such a nice product. It’s a niche of a niche almost,” Yogan said.

MonoSol is looking to be more consumer-oriented as well.

“We are looking at other things like drink mixes that are more a consumer product down the road,” Yogan said. He said the film may be used to portion package powdered drink mixes so the consumer just drops it into water.

“As time goes on, we are getting closer and closer to the consumer,” Bening said.

Bening said they are working with a company that just launched in Canada. The company provides pool and spa chemicals that will be packaged in MonoSol soluble film. Bening said the product should be available in the United States soon as well.

A.J. Monroe, director of planning and community development for the city of Portage, said the city has worked with MonoSol over the past six to seven years on a number of expansions at their County Line Road facility.

“Since I have been here with the city, (MonoSol) has been very aggressive with their expansion and diversifying the things they do,” Monroe said. “They have been in Portage a long time.”

“It really helps Northwest Indiana to diversify its economy by providing the kinds of products they do,” he said.

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