



MADE IN AMERICA

National Metals & Suncor Inc. / www.nationalmetals.com / **Revenues:** \$15 million to \$20 million / **Employees:** 20 / **Specialty:** Engineered metal parts and products / **Doug Kuiper:** "It has been a very difficult, slow growth, but today I have a solid business and no debt."



OWNER DOUG KUIPER SAYS SLOW GROWTH HAS ALLOWED HIM TO BUILD A SOLID BUSINESS THAT HAS NO DEBT.

A FAMILY AFFAIR

SUNCOR AND NATIONAL METALS' OWNER DEVELOPED HIS COMPANIES USING HIS OWN FUNDS. **BY MARTA JIMÉNEZ-LUTTER**

Doug Kuiper funded his first company, Suncor Inc., in 1992 with his wife Patricia in Orlando, Fla. Suncor Inc. works with contractors supplying steel framework, metal rails, stairs, etc. Suncor's annual revenue was \$1 million the first year. All profits were reinvested and the company grew to a 17 million dollar entity by 2005.

In 2009, he started another company that he co-owns with his sons Patrick and Scott. National Metals manufactures metal parts and products for a variety of industries.

SOLID FINANCES

What separates Kuiper from most business owners is that he has no debt. He does not believe in borrowing money from banks and has been

able to build and grow his businesses by reinvesting the money he has made. He did not listen to accountants' and investment gurus' advice, and it paid off.

"Ten years ago I bought a house and paid cash," Kuiper explains. "My accountant recommended getting a loan to pay for the house, and using the cash I had to invest in the stock market, but I didn't believe that was the right thing to do."

As luck would have it, the market went through a correction shortly after and Kuiper's money was untouched. He recognizes that this way of building a business is not easy. "It has been a very difficult, very slow growth, but today I have a solid business and no debt," Kuiper says.

His approach to business has ensured his longevity. When the company had busy years, it saved for the lean years that would surely come.

"We went through four years, from 2004 to 2008 when we couldn't catch our breath, we were so busy," Kuiper explains. "Then, in 2008, the economy started to deteriorate and his business strategy changed. We knew we had to diversify so we started fabricating more non-structural materials like aluminum and stainless specialty products"

CONSTANT INNOVATION

When investing in new technology, Kuiper pays in cash. In 2010, National Metals purchased a \$250,000 water jet cutting machine from Jet Edge with cash. This state-of-the-art machine has enabled National Metals to expand its capabilities by precision cutting materials such as aluminum, copper, bronze and highly reflective materials or steel up to 6 inches thick.

Innovation is very important for Kuiper, who has been in the metals business since 1974 and has seen the field evolve from pencil drawn drafting to AutoCAD renderings and the recent development of building information modeling (BIM).

Some of National Metal's clients have started including in their contracts clauses requesting BIM programs. "Everything is computer generated," Kuiper explains. "Not only the equipment, but drafting, too."

To stay ahead of the curve, Kuiper is planning to incorporate software from 3-D modeling programs into his design process. An example is the Tekla system. This BIM software enables the creation and management of detailed and accurate 3-D models, regardless of material or structural complexity.

"I think this technology is going to be more accurate, faster and the presentations will have a more professional look," Kuiper explains. "It will be easier for the architects and engi-

neers to review our approval submittals since they will be able to view them in 3-D.”

CLIENT FOCUS

A current Suncor subcontract that includes this BIM requirement is for the University of Miami under contract with Suffolk Co. Under a purchase order agreement from Suncor, National Metals will manufacture the stairs, rails, catwalk system and supports for a large tank that will be built to simulate hurricane conditions,” Kuiper explains. National Metals and Suncor have one thing in common – customer service. Kuiper focuses on building relationships. “We are certified by the AISC [American Institute of Steel Construction], so we’re at an equal level with any fabricator in the coun-

try as far as quality,” Kuiper says. “Oftentimes, we work with the contractor, budgeting and planning for a couple of years before the project starts. We always try to help them find more economical ways to build.

“We strive for long-term relationships, we don’t have a huge customer base, we don’t throw out bids and work for hundreds of people,” he adds. “We have repeat customers.”

One of those repeat customers is Suffolk, one of the most successful privately owned construction management firms in the country. National Metals and Suncor have worked with Suffolk on many projects over the years including Muvico movie theaters located in Boca Raton, St. Petersburg and Tampa, Fla., and Arundel Mills, Md. Suncor provided the structural steel, stadium seating

framing, steel pan stair systems and railings for all these theaters.

SPECIAL PRODUCTS

A new line of products that is taking off for the companies is architectural sunshades, which are built by National Metals and distributed by Suncor. Sunshades are mounted on the buildings to provide shade and architectural interest. The shapes are extruded using custom dies to meet the specific demands of each project. These sun shades are manufactured from aluminum to prevent corrosion and are coated with Kynar, anodizing or powder coating.

Kuiper says the market has stabilized and has begun to grow again, and is poised to slowly, steadily continue to grow his businesses and pass the torch to his sons some day. **mt**



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