

DOORS, FRAMES AND WINDOWS

AMBICO combines sales, service and installation for the local market, with specialized manufacturing for the world

STAFF WRITER
– The OCR Special Feature

Over its more than 60-year history in the Ottawa area, AMBICO has grown and evolved its product offering to better serve its market. The company has also strategically reinvented itself, establishing the company's name and reputation as a leader in the worldwide industry. All the while, the company has remained true to its Ottawa roots, and to supplying the contractors and marketplace at the heart of its success.

AMBICO was founded in 1955 by brothers-in-law Israel Shinder and Emanuel Lightstone. Today the company is run by cousins-in-law Jack Shinder (son of Israel) and Judah Silverman (son-in-law of Emanuel).

At its start AMBICO was a distributor and installer of overhead doors that grew its product line to include ancillary products such as pressed steel door frames and then later, doors. By 1961 the company turned to manufacturing its own products, starting with door frames and then growing the line, as a way of providing better and more reliable service to its clients.

Vice president Judah Silverman says that by the early 1970s AMBICO's product offering included doors, frames, hardware and other components. He says while the company still distributed the garage doors and loading dock equipment its history was based on, it grew to be a dominant player in eastern Ontario as a manufacturer and distributor of a full range of projects.

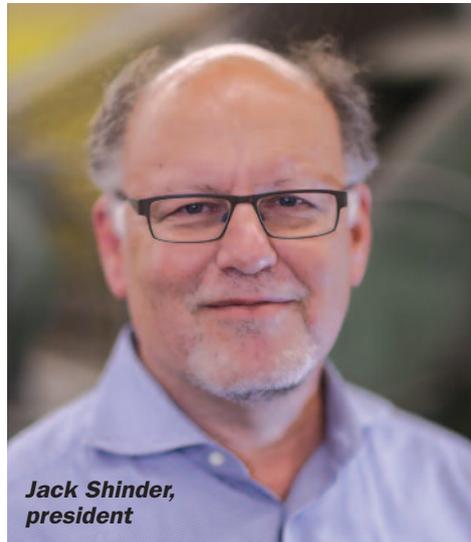
"Virtually every building constructed downtown during the 70's contains some of our product. We had product going into schools and hospitals and were shipping product throughout the Great Lakes area."

In the 1980s the next generation came to the company and by 1988 had taken over operational control. By now the company had begun to manufacture specialized product such as acoustic doors and frames, as well as products to meet unique performance criteria, typically at the request of specific clients.

"Our clients have always said that as a family-run independent business we are easier to deal with, more nimble, and adaptable. This means when we get requests for unique items we can take the time to really consider the possibility, more often saying yes to the client than no."

Silverman says the process of examination starts with sales and estimating to determine cost options, moves into engineering review to determine the best approach, and then to the factory for ideas about manufacturing. This process, he says, is part of a company culture built around customer service and an understanding that often the impossible, is actually possible.

In the early 90s the door and hardware industry was hit by both a consolidation of distribution companies and the external pressure of a deep recession. Silverman says he and Shinder took this as an opportunity to strategize about the future of the company, its current model, and in the end, to make the



Jack Shinder,
president

decision to develop a two-pronged business model that included a local sales, service and installation division, as well as specialized product manufacturing.

While the company continues to evolve its world presence and expertise in this specialized niche, it has remained true to its Ottawa roots and to the customers it began serving. AMBICO still maintains a full local distribution system, including a showroom and hardware counter ready to serve the local trades. In addition, AMBICO's qualified team, trained and insured, installs and services new or existing products on site.

The company's work is warranted and AMBICO provides preventive maintenance and service contracts. "Our fleet of trucks is on the road, ready to provide emergency service 24 hours a day, 7 days a week."

Still based in Ottawa, AMBICO employs more than 90 staff in various capacities, including about 40 in the factory producing highly specialized products. Silverman says although finding skilled manufacturing labour in Ottawa is a challenge, this is where the family has always been, it is where they live, work and play, and it is where they will remain.

The company has recently seen its first round of long-term employees retire. While this represents a loss of knowledge and experience, Silverman says AMBICO took this as an opportunity to bring in new ideas and new faces who will be trained in the company's culture and the skills required to con-

tinue its work.

Working with independent sales representatives across North America, the company has grown to be a major player in the industry. AMBICO also took steps to advance its global presence by identifying partners in other parts of the world, and then licensing them to use AMBICO's technology to manufacture for and service their own regional markets.

Today the AMBICO product line includes several key threads: Acoustic door and frame products, which are specified in projects ranging from schools, auditoria and recording studios to government, defence contracting firms and others requiring sound proofing. Blast resistant door and frame products, which are in demand for security or protection against volatile processes, are designed to protect buildings, their occupants and equipment from explosive incidents.

Demand comes from military, government, public buildings and institutions, infrastructure and industrial environments, Silverman says. The company also manufactures bullet resistant door and frame units as well as stainless steel doors and frames, and brass or bronze clad doors and frames for decorative purposes. Stainless steel doors and frames also have applications for process based functions such as food, dairy and pharmaceutical industries.

He says the company focuses a lot of effort on research and development, elevating the levels products can achieve, improving manufacturing efficiency and creating products that are more user-friendly. "We are always working to remove the barriers to architects specifying products and to owners wanting our product whether that means making a door lighter weight or ensuring more common hardware can be used."

Though door systems make up a small portion of a construction project in terms of materials, it is also an element that requires interface with one of the highest numbers of trades. This means working to co-ordinate and ensure the product satisfies this wide variety of requirements.

AMBICO's products have been specified for their unique characteristics and flexibility, in a number of high security and high profile projects.



Judah Silverman,
vice president

For the federal government's 80-year old Victory Building in Winnipeg, AMBICO was asked to retrofit doors at the entrance and lobby. The company worked with heritage architects from Public Works to replicate doors that would "complement the original design intent of the building's design team." The building featured a 1930s modified art deco architectural style that was popular at the time.

Another recent and significant project involved the iconic Sir John A. Macdonald building in Ottawa. Here, AMBICO was challenged with, among other things, creating monumental wood doors designed to meet speech privacy requirements in 85-year old halls; and with bullet resistant door and frame assemblies that also had to meet the "demanding requirements of the heritage architect and the unique decorative demands of the classic structure."

The company continues to be family-run and to employ people who are considered family. "Our people have a sense of pride and ownership that doesn't come from a large corporate structure or chain of command. The people we work with have a stake in the company's future and that translates to a personal interest in our customers and in ensuring their success."

At AMBICO's 60th anniversary celebration in September 2015, Silverman commented that no one ever knows what the future holds. He reminded those in attendance of what he had said at the 50th anniversary celebration: "Israel Shinder and Manny Lightstone's commitment to quality product, coupled with the highest level of dedication by their employees....are a lasting legacy that help guide Jack and I as we have assumed management of this sacred trust that they carefully left in our hands."

The company will grow and it may change its strategic direction as markets and demands for specific products grow. It will always though stay true to the vision of its founders, and to its commitment to the Ottawa market and the people it serves.

For more information on the company's local hardware sales counter and services, please visit www.ambico.ca. For AMBICO's internationally available specialized doors and frames, please visit www.ambico.com.

