

Mike Kilkenny - Taylor Forge

This is Kansas Profile. I'm Ron Wilson, director of the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development at Kansas State University.

Slug catchers and pig traps. Those sound like things you might find in a garden or hog farm, but they are actually devices that are used in the natural gas industry. Today we'll meet a remarkable Kansas company which is the world's leading supplier of such devices and which also builds metal products used in ways as diverse as nuclear submarines and rockets for outer space. It's today's Kansas Profile.

Mike Kilkenny is CEO and owner of Taylor Forge Engineered Systems in Paola, Kansas. This amazing company produces heavy duty products for these diverse uses and more.

In 1900, an inventor named J. Hall Taylor launched a pipe works company - now known as Taylor Forge - in Chicago. Three decades later, another engineering company started a facility in Paola, Kansas to serve the natural gas industry. Paola is centrally located between the Hugoton gas field to the west and industrial centers in big cities to the east.

In 1959, Taylor Forge bought the plant in Paola. After changes in ownership, Taylor Forge Engineered Systems of Paola was created. Gary Kilkenny had been a salesman for Taylor Forge. In 1984, Gary and co-worker Tom Walsh bought Taylor Forge Engineered Systems and took it private. At that time, the company employed approximately 140 people.

Gary's son Mike Kilkenny was trained as an engineer in Illinois. He ultimately joined the business and became majority owner of the company in 1998. The company has expanded to include a plant in Tulsa plus facilities in other Kansas communities.

"We are manufacturers of very large, very heavy steel products with an emphasis on the natural gas and oil industries," Mike Kilkenny said. "For example, we are probably the world's leading supplier of exotic-sounding products called slug catchers and pig traps," he said with a smile.

What are slug catchers and pig traps? A slug catcher helps with the initial separation of natural gas from oil in the natural gas transmission process. Pig traps, sometimes called launchers and receivers, are the devices through which pigs are inserted and removed from natural gas pipelines to clean impurities along the lining. Despite their utilitarian names, these products play an important role in the industry.

Taylor Forge offers other products for the oil and gas business, such as pressure vessels and related pipeline, processing and refining equipment. One example is Vortex Technology Separation equipment, which essentially uses centrifugal force to separate oil and gas very efficiently.

Besides the energy industry, Taylor Forge Engineering Systems has several other key product lines. The company is a supplier in the defense industry to the U.S. Navy and to NASA in the aerospace industry.

"When the space program is active, we're active," Mike Kilkenny said. "We were part of the Apollo space program in the 1960s." More recently, his company's products were used in connection with the space shuttle.

Taylor Forge products are also used deep in the ocean. "For the U.S. Navy, we manufacture steam piping for nuclear reactors for submarines and aircraft carriers," Mike

said. As noted, Taylor Forge's high strength, high pressure vessels are important in the energy industry.

"The remaining oilfields in the world are found in deeper and deeper water," Mike said. Taylor Forge products are needed for offshore oil platforms around the globe.

"We serve customers in 30 or 40 countries around the world," Mike said. "It is always interesting when our customers come to visit." It has to be a bit of a surprise when those customers find a space-age company like Taylor Forge Engineered Systems with plants in rural communities like Paola and Greeley, population 330 people. Now, that's rural.

"We have very skilled people here who get the job done right," Mike said. "And we don't just employ 250 people, we employ 250 families."

For more information, see www.taylorforge.com.

Slug catchers, pig traps, nuclear submarines and spacecraft. They are all part of the diverse products and industries served by this amazing company. We salute Mike Kilkenny and all those with Taylor Forge Engineered Systems for making a difference with quality engineering and products, from the depths of the ocean to outer space.

For the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development, this is Ron Wilson with Kansas Profile.