



40 year-old firm finds sports is a support even in a recession

By Mae Lee Sun, special for Inside Tucson Business
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In the early 1960s, Gerry Detty's dad had an idea. As head athletic trainer for the Philadelphia Eagles, G.E. "Moose" Detty discovered neoprene was the perfect material to help promote healing and prevent injury.

The synthetic rubber had excellent insulating properties and helped to retain heat, which increased circulation. Moose had his wife sew the prototypes of ankle braces, knee braces, thigh supports in a makeshift shop in their garage.

When one of the players was traded, they took their neoprene support or brace with them, leaving the door wide open for Detty to launch a business in professional orthopedics as the custom-made devices needed to be replaced. Thus was born Pro Orthopedic Devices Inc.

Gerry Detty has since taken the company over and succeeded his father as chief executive officer. The company has thrived in a south Tucson warehouse for nearly 40 years. For all of his contributions to the health and well-being of professional athletes from the NFL, he was awarded honorary membership into the Professional Football Athletic Trainer's Society at the NFL Combines last month in Indianapolis.

Success and recognition for Detty and Pro Orthopedics hasn't been easy. Especially in the past few years, says Detty, who has had to make some major changes in how he does business. Even as the top U.S. supplier of orthopedic neoprene products for professional athletes, the equine industry and retail sales.

"Our competition has been importing product for some time. We were holding out and manufacturing everything in the U.S., which is what we prided ourselves on because of quality. My product engineer, however, said if we did it right, we could create a significant savings by moving manufacturing overseas," says Detty.

"That was about two years ago and he was right. The duty on mostly assembled products is only 4 or 5 percent compared to 18 percent for sheet goods or raw materials. To have good quality assurance, we had to install a QA Program and convince the Chinese that even if it costs us a little more, the quality of the product would remain at a high level and would equal what we were doing here. The challenge was that they (Chinese) were so used to being asked by everyone (other countries and importers) to cut corners to make things as cheaply as possible," he said.

Apparently, Detty's business decisions have paid off. Japan remains one of his company's biggest

markets and has been so for the past 30 years.

Alan Cohen, partner in the Philadelphia-based firm of Isdaner & Company LLC., also Detty's business accountant for the past 30 years, attributes much of this to managing the company with an open mind and keeping the bar high.

"Pro Orthopedics was always the best

at what they did. They've maintained their market share over the years because Gerry and his father were continually open to talking to us and getting wisdom from those around them. We've been able to advise them about their options: how to structure their manufacturing Process, tax savings and banking. It's also due to Gerry's leadership over the past seven or eight years that's really helped them during these challenging times," Cohen said.

Domestically, Pro Orthopedics continues to dominate the professional sports market by 85 percent as the number one supplier to the National Football League, the National Basketball Association and Major League Baseball, along with colleges, high schools and Olympic teams around the world. That's a 3 percent rise from 2008 numbers.

Big 5 Sporting Goods is the company's largest domestic retail client. Detty is working on expanding to the general public by placing products in drug stores and pharmacies. Even in a recession, Detty feels confident things can only get better, especially when it comes to the sports industry.

"My dad always told me that during the Great Depression, no matter how hard things got, people would always be able to find a nickel to go to the movies or a dime to go to a game. Sports are an outlet during recessionary times. Even today, softball teams are on the rise and basketball and volleyball teams are running record numbers across the country. It's a real opportunity for us to develop new materials and designs. We've already got three new products we're introducing for back, knee and ankle support," Detty said.

"As long as I'm able to keep cash flow up, inventories reduced and forecasting needs more accurately, we should remain viable. We're already seeing the effects of the recession shifting so that's encouraging," he said.

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