



# Manufacturing & So Much More

## Celebrating a Rich History and a Bright Future for Great Bend

When Mark Chalfant mentions he works for Fuller Industries LLC, people often reply with some version of ‘do you think it is going to survive?’ As chief executive officer at Fuller, Chalfant doesn’t hesitate to reassure individuals and businesses that not only will the company survive, it will thrive.

To illustrate his reason for optimism, Chalfant pointed out that four new products are already in the works at Fuller and new hires will soon be on board. He has been here only six months; before that, he was chief operations officer at a Dodge City manufacturing company. (See adjacent story for details on the new products.)

“There has been a fear with our employees and the community about Fuller’s future,” Chalfant said. “Part of my job is to change that culture, that mindset. What Fuller is about today is a well-kept secret in Great Bend. I recognized that early on. Therefore, our goal is to expose the community to Fuller and vice versa.”

A golden opportunity for exposure is set for Oct. 4, the date for the local Manufacturing Day. The Fuller team is collaborating with the Great Bend Chamber of Commerce & Economic Development on this project. “We are heavily involved in this event,” Chalfant said. “We want to offer tours to high school students, guidance counselors, parents, under-employed people, community college graduates and others.”

Not only does Fuller offer a variety of manufacturing jobs, it also seeks people to fill roles in chemistry, quality assurance, programming and automation. For instance, as technology is brought up-to-date, new equipment will have to be programmed.

“This exposure during Manufacturing Day will help ensure people know manufacturing is an important sector of the economy in Great Bend, Barton County and the United States,” Chalfant emphasized. “This is because of the multiplier effect that goes along with it. The revenue stream is so much more than in other sectors.”

Chalfant offered a few eye-opening statistics to back up his comments. For every one dollar spent in manufacturing, another \$1.82 is added to the economy. For every one worker in manufacturing, there are four employees hired elsewhere. And, the majority of manufacturers in the U.S. are small firms.



Chalfant made special note of one of the 10 goals recently compiled by the Great Bend Better Than Great Community Visioning group. The third goal on the list is “additional industry,” which dovetails nicely with Fuller. “This is part and parcel of what Fuller is all about,” Chalfant said. “If we can grow by 40-50 employees, we would effectively be attaining this particular goal.

“So, I ask myself every day, ‘what can I do to achieve this?’ We can’t do this in isolation but rather as a piece of the greater puzzle. It would be very important to the community if we can grow the number of employees and the revenue.”

Currently, Fuller employs more than 130 people. Chalfant hopes to add “somewhere between 10 and 40 employees because of the new products. We have already started hiring and will continue as needed. There certainly will be more employees by the end of the year. “We want Fuller to grow into the company of choice as an employer,” he continued. “We want people to say ‘hey, I got a job at Fuller. I am set for life with good opportunities and a good career.’ There are fun opportunities here, as well as challenges.”

Chalfant collaborates with his “great leadership team,” which has a balance of new and experienced employees. Some have been on the job only a few months, while others have devoted more than 20 years to the company. “I have confidence in this team,” he noted. “We always talk about how to keep moving the needle forward and have all oars going in the same direction and same speed.”

## Diversifying with New Products

Haley Ruble, Fuller Industries director of marketing, outlined the basics of four new products at the plant since new management started in March.

First is a roto-molding machine that makes parts for a new industrial partner. The machine will operate around the clock during three shifts. “The order is large and we will operate the machine constantly to satisfy our new business partner,” Ruble said. “The production involves an intricate design and is time-consuming.”

The three work shifts are expected to begin this month.

Other new additions at Fuller are: a full line of laundry detergents and fabric softeners for industrial use; a full line of cleaning products for utensils in commercial kitchens; and super-concentrated cleaning products that come in smaller containers, which are eco-friendly and cost-effective.

Ruble shared a few other details about Fuller, a company with sales and manufacturing representatives throughout the United States. It was founded in 1906. ILS is still the main stockholder; local individual investors are stockholders too.

The Fuller Retail Store, which offers a variety of cleaning products, is open 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays and 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Saturdays. A large catalog of products is on the Fuller website.

The company’s address is One Fuller Way, near the intersection of 10th Street and SW 40 Ave. (airport road).

