

Webster's Classic Automation: Agility in serving control systems users is key to success

■ Andrea Deckhert

Fritz Ruebeck founded Classic Automation LLC after identifying a gap in the market for high-quality refurbished and replacement automation equipment.

He was on to something.

The Webster-based business — celebrating its 20th anniversary — has grown in size and scope since its inception in 2003.



Fritz Ruebeck

Classic Automation provides parts, products and services to users of installed control systems. The business has over 25,000 customers in more than 110 countries.

"I am incredibly proud of what we have achieved over the past 20 years," said Ruebeck, the company's president. "Our success is a testament to the hard work and dedication of our employees, as well as the loyalty of our customers. We are grateful for their support and look forward to continuing to provide high-quality parts and repairs for many years to come."

Ruebeck credits much of the company's success to its ability to meet and exceed its customers' needs, which often come when their production lines are down and they are in urgent need of a part to get operations back up and running.

As a result, Classic Automation has to anticipate what a customer may need and respond when that need arises, Ruebeck explained.

The business is also able to pivot.

During the height of COVID-19, for example, demand from customers in the travel and tourism industry — such as from cruise ships — dropped, while oth-

er sectors, such as food production and health care, grew. Classic Automation adjusted accordingly.

The model is working, with the business having a record year in 2022. Sales were up 30 percent last year over the previous year and this year is off to a strong start, as well, Ruebeck noted.

Ruebeck, an engineer by trade, started the one-man operation in his home, using a business model that was based on a website that supplied parts for existing control systems.

The company took off, gaining a reputation for providing reliable and cost-effective automation parts and repairs.

As a result, Ruebeck added workers and moved the operation into a 12,000-square-foot space on Monroe Avenue in 2006.

The business would move to its current 41,000-square-foot location on Salt Road in 2013 where it has grown to roughly 65 employees. Growth prompted the need for a 12,000-square-foot warehouse expansion in 2019.

Classic Automation's growth has been organic, Ruebeck said, mainly through expanding its product lines and customer base.

Classic Automation has also invested heavily in technology and infrastructure to ensure its customers receive the best possible service.

In addition, the company's repair facility and testing lab are staffed by technicians who can diagnose and repair almost any type of automation equipment.

In 2022, the company added to its capabilities, introducing its own line of process panel controllers called Pan-elicity.

Pan-elicity is a controller designed to simplify new installations and provide



updated technology for upgrades of older panel controllers.

There is also a focus on sustainability at the firm, with the goal of extending the lifecycles of existing systems by refurbishing and repairing parts.

Moving forward, business leaders are considering adding capabilities to its web site, with the goal of creating a smoother, more seamless customer experience, Ruebeck noted, as well as improving its internal processes.

The company — whose motto is "We help keep the world's production running" — remains committed to its founding principles of quality, reliability and customer service, he said.

Justin Gottorff, MPS coordinator at International Paper, has called Classic Automation a number of times to inquire about its inventory.

Gottorff recently had a machine go down and was able to secure the needed part from Classic Automation in a timely manner.

"The fact that there is a business in Rochester that can service my facility's requests (on the) same day is rare," Gottorff said, commenting on the notable customer service from Classic Automation's employees. "They have gone above and beyond, in my opinion, to not only get our facility up and running again but have (also) reduced the stress."