



## EXCELLENCE IN A SMALL COMPANY

FEWER THAN 50 EMPLOYEES

# Diversification keeps N.K. firm on road to success

BY TARYN PLUMB | Contributing Writer

**POINT-OF-SALE ADVERTISING** is all about getting noticed. It may sound like a simple concept, but it requires just the right combination of imaging, placement and presentation to pique the interest of potential customers whose senses are otherwise being bombarded.

For nearly half a century, **Custom Design Inc.** has made itself stand out by making its customers do the same.

The North Kingstown-based company, which is celebrating its 40th anniversary this year, crafts merchandising displays, store fixtures and casements from inception to completion for a variety of retailers, offering a one-stop shop for design services, engineering, prototyping and manufacturing.

Founded in Cranston in 1976 by Raul Dias Jr., the small, family-run manufacturer has a diverse customer base spanning the spectrum of retail segments, from discount and convenience stores to high-end, global powerhouses, counting among the latter Versace, Polo Ralph Lauren, Ray-Ban, Burberry and many others.

“Never would you think that a small company in Rhode Island would be making displays for the likes of Fendi or Gucci,” said Custom Design Vice President Adam Dias.

When his father, Raul, established the business, there were 88 similar companies in Rhode Island – many of them having cropped up in response to the costume-jewelry boom of the latter half of the century, Adam Dias explained.

But today? Just two of those businesses remain, he said. So for Custom Design to not only survive, but thrive, over the years, the company has wholeheartedly embodied its name.

Its 65,000-square-foot facility in the Quonset Business Park comprises a main manufacturing facility, woodworking shop and metal shop. Customers come in with a pre-existing design or collaborate with the company’s in-house artistic team; designs are then rendered, approved, estimated, engineered, prototyped and, finally, manufactured and shipped – all on-site.

“The reason people rely on us is our one-stop-shop competency,” said Dias, who has been involved in the family company since age 9.

Custom Design has strategically expanded its capabilities to maintain a competitive advantage when it comes to quality, pricing, and – most crucially – timing. The company has also made a commitment to American-made items; all products are manufactured



**KEY PARTS OF A WHOLE:** From left, account manager Taylor Kenney, production manager Jesse Godin and Custom Design Vice President Adam Dias are seen at the North Kingstown company.

PBN PHOTO/RUPERT WHITELEY

in-house.

To further streamline processes, the company’s 49 full-time employees and a temporary workforce of another roughly two dozen are cross-trained, skilled and knowledgeable in multiple aspects of the process.

“We are able to integrate through all facets of our business to keep that quick lead time as an asset,” said Dias. “Our design department and engineering department – in conjunction with our prototyping department – the years of experience they have is huge. There are so many things that we do.”

The company also has experienced significant growth through strategic acquisitions.

In 2005, it broadened its opera-

tions with metal tubing, sheeting and wire displays with the purchase of Ocean State Wire. In 2014, it branched into the growing plastics market with the acquisition of Royal Display, which it relocated from Connecticut. As Dias explained, Custom Design had used the company on a subcontractor basis, and began witnessing a shift – and ultimately, lost opportunities – in materials in large sectors of the retail market.

The company has experienced steady, double-digit growth: Between 2012 and 2013 it expanded by 13 percent; between 2013 and 2014 it grew by another 16 percent. It is projecting another 12 percent growth between 2015 and 2016.

Due to restructuring and the

execution of a multiyear sales and account management plan, the company has seen an increase in its domestic shipments, Dias said. Exports of displays to Canada, Mexico and the Caribbean, as well as Europe, Japan and Kuwait, have grown as well.

As the company torch is passed on from father, Raul, to son Adam, the goal is to further broaden offerings, customers and capabilities. “Diversification only makes our business more stable,” said Adam Dias. ■

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ADAM DIAS, Custom Design Inc. vice president