

PRESIDENT DAVE TRINKLEY (LEFT) AND VICE PRESIDENT JAIME PORTILLO MAKE SURE THE COMPANY REMAINS FOCUSED ON HIGH-QUALITY SOLUTIONS.

ADVANCING SERVICE

GRAPHTEL CONTINUES TO EXPAND IN ITS MARKETS AND BUILD STRONG RELATIONSHIPS. **BY STACI DAVIDSON**

Graphel Carbon Products, the provider of precision graphite solutions, has been expanding its technology, team and knowledge base to enhance what it offers daily to its customers. This is due in part to the company's substantial increase in business across all markets it serves. All customers need new products with tighter tolerances at a faster pace than ever before. But the focus on expansion also

comes from Graphel's dedication to maintaining a high level of quality in all it does.

"We are a consistent quality supplier – that is how we are known," President Dave Trinkley explains. "We are fully vested in Six Sigma, currently running at a 4 Sigma level but we're striving to get to a world-class level of 5. Continuing to drive internal improvements will support our cus-

tomers time-lines by increasing their efficiency to utilize parts that are in tolerance the first time, every time".

With facilities in Ohio, Minnesota and South Carolina, as well as sales offices in other areas, Graphel provides broad precision graphite machining capabilities to support the performance of clients in aerospace, tool and die, power generation, aviation, hermetic seals and medical companies. Trinkley was a client of Graphel during his time as Director of Operations at GrafTech International but became the leader of Graphel in 2015 when the incumbent president retired.

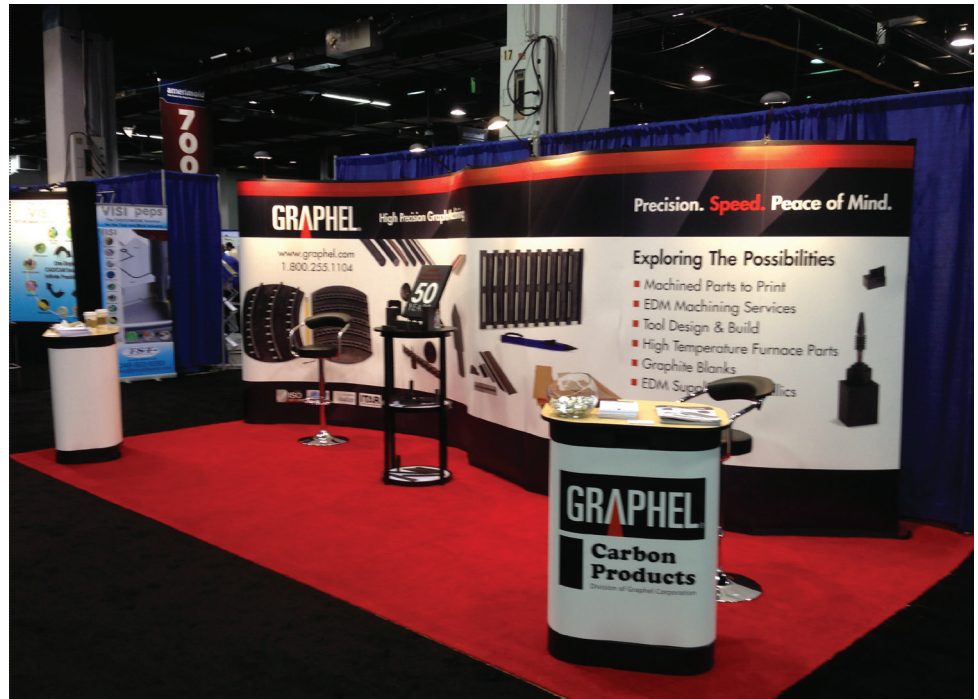
Graphel Carbon Products / www.graphel.com / Headquarters: West Chester, Ohio / **Specialty:** Graphite tooling and application solutions / **Dave Trinkley, president:** "It is awesome to see a younger generation come in with new ideas and new thoughts."

“When I joined the team, Graphel was already a leader in the manufacturing of electrodes in the electrical discharge machining [EDM] industry,” Trinkley says. “However, my focus was, and remains, to drive growth and improve the operational efficiency of the business.”

Graphel is approaching its 55th anniversary next year and maintains its leadership position with advanced knowledge of this industry, as well as staff members who have an average of 15 to 20 years of machining experience with several exceeding 30 years.

“Our understanding and knowledge of the raw materials we use, how these are composed, and the applications they excel in sets us apart,” Trinkley adds. “We understand the demands our customers face and are 100 percent engaged and partnered with them.

“We provide full support including selection of raw materials, design of electrodes, design and build of the



tooling needed in the machine, and we work with our customers on improving their process,” he says.

“Rather than taking an approach like other businesses may, Graphel

assigns a specific customer service manager to each client, no matter the size, with the intention to better understand our customers’ needs and to create long-lasting partnerships.”

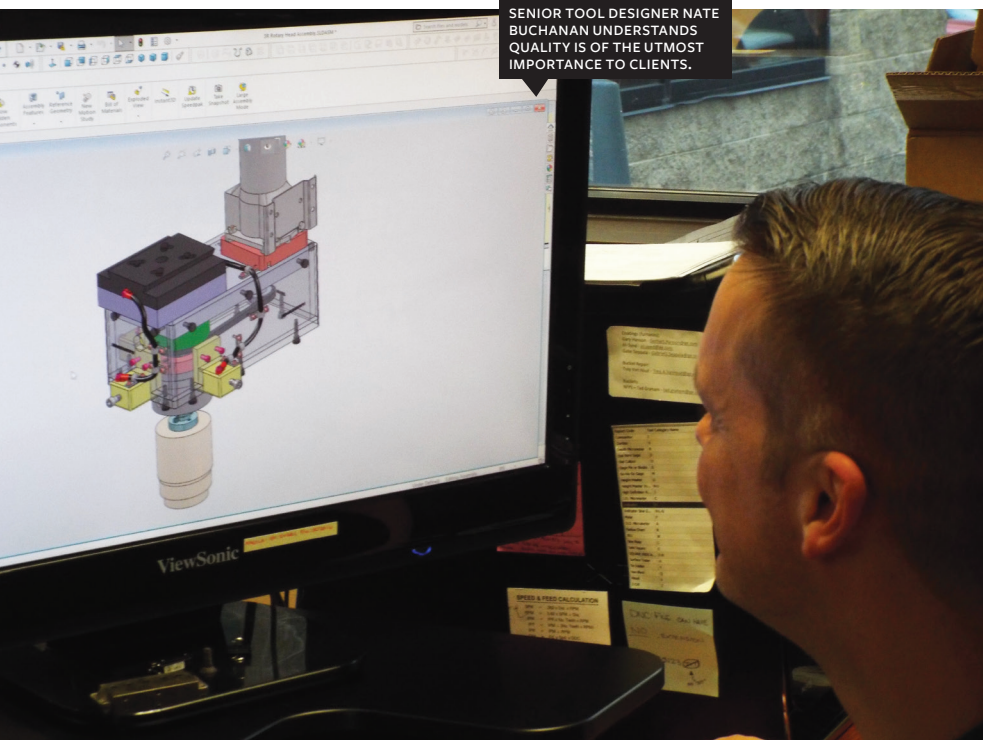
WORLD-CLASS GOALS

Graphel takes pride in its expansion into the aerospace market because of its ability work with highly complex customer requirements from design to prints to finished parts. Trinkley explains that the company’s research and development team has been key in this endeavor. The R&D team partnered with the engineering team can design and manufacture a part for a customer faster than ever before.

If the client’s needs change, this team takes the initiative to address to the needed changes and produce the parts as required in the fastest manner possible.

Being flexible is important for all the markets in which Graphel is involved, and therefore the company has established some short-run »

SENIOR TOOL DESIGNER NATE BUCHANAN UNDERSTANDS QUALITY IS OF THE UTMOST IMPORTANCE TO CLIENTS.



» cells to respond to its customers' needs even faster.

At the same time, Graphel continues to improve its operation. In 2015, the company began its journey with lean manufacturing and has invested heavily in internal training, machine technology and machining methods technology. Additionally, the R&D team also assists in these goals with internal process improvements. The company can support customers when they need help with processes, as well.

"We supply a large amount of parts to aerospace customers and quality is of the utmost importance," Trinkley says. "One of our customers was performing a 100 percent inspection on parts they were receiving to ensure the parts were in compliance. They approached us to reduce that number to below 50 percent. We did several studies on their requirements, designed an inspec-

tion plan, identified CTQ features, and changed what we were doing in support of this effort. By working together with our customer, we were able to get incoming inspections below 5 percent. This shows the importance of having a quality and an engineering team with decades of experience in graphite electrodes and aerospace applications."

"WE UNDERSTAND THE DEMANDS OUR CUSTOMERS FACE AND ARE 100 PERCENT ENGAGED AND PARTNERED WITH THEM."

When investing in technology, Graphel focuses on what is best for its machining processes, Trinkley notes. Graphel does internal training and various classes for eight weeks,

and then does another round of eight-week training that involves blueprint reading, advanced blueprint reading, GD&T and the like.

"Our employees go through what we call "quality coach training" that equips and qualifies them to perform shop floor inspections for one another as an extension of quality, it is like an operator acceptance program with additional independent layers of validation," he explains. "We have 75 quality coaches inside the company and that number is constantly growing."

"We can't get to world class if we don't continue down this road," he adds. "When customers come to Graphel, we want them to have confidence in us. Customers will get the right parts the first time, because they don't have time to wait on second-run parts. We do an intense amount of internal training to advance the technical skills of our team because our employees are our largest assets. By investing in a team member today, their value goes up, and we recognize that. We strive to continue to build our internal training program to advance our team."

A CULTURE OF 'VIBRANCY'

Graphel plans to grow by expanding its sales coverage into new areas, and while it has high expectations for growth, the company will continue to invest in its team to ensure that growth is achieved with an ongoing focus on quality. Trinkley notes Graphel's culture continues to drive the business forward.

"We have the absolute greatest people – it's absolutely stunning, and we also have a great group of young people coming through which is crucial for building the future," he says. "Our business is mature, but it's awesome to see a younger generation come in with

GRAPHTEL USES INTERNAL TRAINING AND LEAN PROCESSES TO MEET CLIENTS' STRICT NEEDS.



new ideas and new thoughts. They bring that to a company that's 54 years old and we see what they can teach us."

"Additionally, our ownership is outstanding and extremely supportive of our growth and objectives. The ownership is very engaged with the team."

At the same time, Graphel plans to maintain strong relationships with its customers, which Trinkley describes as "often individualized" because Graphel has had many of these relationships for decades.

By assigning each client to a customer service manager, the relationship becomes very understanding and often the customer service manager knows what clients need as soon as they call. With its ongoing investments in technology and the team, Graphel is driving down lead times, becoming more responsive, and more relied upon.

"Our belief is that if we want to become the best and biggest electrical discharge machining and graphite machining manufacturer in the world, we need to continue to focus on quality, delivery and technological advancements. That will get us where we want to go. Our goal is to grow and maybe double over the next five to seven years, and we can do that by focusing on what we do now. If we continue to serve our customers, improve for our customers, and enhance our capabilities internally, we will set ourselves apart and grow."

"I couldn't be prouder of the team Graphel has assembled at all of our locations and at all levels," Trinkley says. "We are very fortunate to have the team and ownership that we have. The people here bring a vibrancy and are always up for the challenge to change for any market condition or customer need. It's amazing to watch what our people can do." **mt**



GRAPHTEL PROVIDES BROAD PRECISION GRAPHITE MACHINING CAPABILITIES TO SUPPORT CLIENTS IN MANY MARKETS, SUCH AS POWER GENERATION.



ITS ABILITY TO WORK WITH HIGHLY COMPLEX CUSTOMER REQUIREMENTS HAS ALLOWED GRAPHTEL TO EXPAND WITH AEROSPACE CLIENTS.