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## The China Price? Yeah, we can beat that

**Circle Pines-based injection molder Advanced Molding Technologies is expanding in space and workforce.**

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Advanced Molding has contracted with consultant Jan Jenkins, center, to provide business methods that help with hiring and communications. The company's executive team includes (from left) Steve Jenkins, Dave Gehring, Brett Nelson and John Haley.

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Advanced Molding Technologies is becoming well-versed on expanding.

Circle Pines-based Advanced is adding a 36,000-square-foot facility next to its existing plant on the heels of a 14,000-square-foot addition in 2012.

The additional building will more than double the space the injection molding company had before 2012, creating room for at least eight more machines and about 6,000 square feet in clean rooms. The expansion follows double-digit sales growth for the past several years.

Once the expansion is completed, owner [Brett Nelson](#) said he plans to add 50 to 75 employees, which now has about 175 workers.

Part of Advanced's success has been its ability to be competitive with low-labor countries through the use of high-speed automation assembly, said [Steve Jenkins](#), Advanced's business development manager. Two-thirds of Advanced's sales are from selling custom-made plastic parts to the medical-device industry.

A 2013 study by AlixPartners, a business advisory firm, estimated that manufacturing in the U.S. will match the cost of manufacturing in China by 2015, but Advanced is already a step ahead. Recently, the firm produced a complex piece for 10 cents less per part than a Chinese competitor.

However, cost is just one aspect of being successful in the injection molding industry. While pricing should still be competitive, it all comes down to trust, said [David Gehring](#), operations controller. "If they trust you, then that's the word on the street about our company."

Part of what makes Advanced trustworthy is its culture, Gehring said. Managers have taken steps to preserve the environment they created more than 14 years ago.

"We all know from being in business long enough that through growth you can become silos and the communication breaks down," Jenkins said. "This team absolutely does not want that to happen."

To help, Advanced partnered with Jenkins' wife, [Jan Jenkins](#), who owns Savage-based Legacy of Courage, two years ago to provide communication tools and workshops to Advanced.

Those tools also have been incorporated into the hiring process, which has been a challenge during the company's growth, Nelson said. Finding candidates who are both qualified and fit into the company's culture can be elusive.

"Quite frankly, there's a lot of people who have the basic skills, but you've got to find someone who doesn't have their own agenda," he said.

Hiring isn't Advanced's only growing pain. Building the new facility has been a surprisingly long process, Nelson said. In the meantime, everyone is working in tight spaces.

"We've had to put presses, because of our growth, in very good places, but not where we ultimately would like to have them," said [John Haley](#), vice president of operations. "It's a little cramped in here right now, but it's about to change."

Not all expansion surprises have been negative, however. Through the expansions, employees were given new opportunities, Haley said. Many were willing to rise to the occasion.

"It surprised me how people stepped up to fill in gaps that, when you grow like that, will be created," he said.