

Dayton Area Company Growing Through Work With Military

A Third Of Lion's Revenue Comes From Military Logistics Services

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VANDALIA – A \$12.4 million contract to manage a Marine Corps warehouse network for distributing combat equipment and protective gear calls attention to a growing business sector for Lion, the company best known for supplying protective firefighter apparel.

The one-year contract awarded in December by the Navy, of which the Marine Corps is a part, supplements business that Lion has cultivated with the Army and the Navy managing supply-chain operations and refurbishing military apparel and gear to extend its use.

Providing logistics services for the military through the Lion Vallen Industries business unit accounts for about one-third of the company's overall revenue. Lion doesn't publicly disclose its financial results, but says total revenue is more than \$100 million annually.

Lion's primary focus is still its business in serving fire departments and other emergency first-responders, said Steve Schwartz, chief executive officer of the 113-year-old, family owned company. Its customers range from the Chicago and Chilean firefighting forces to Vandalia and Butler Twp. locally. It has made inroads with New York City's fire department by selling it chemical-biological protective suits.

But the company sees opportunities to offer the federal government improved management and tracking of equipment inventories so that the government will know more about what it has and needs to buy, Schwartz said.

There is also more money to be made in expanding Lion's capacity to train customers to use its products more effectively, he said.

"We think it's an interesting market," Schwartz said.

Formally known as Lion Apparel Inc., the company adopted the shorter trade name "Lion" in 2010, the same year it relocated within Vandalia to newly leased quarters near Interstate 75 that provide more space for conference rooms and a larger testing laboratory.

Tight municipal budgets for firefighters and uncertainty caused by Congress' inability to approve long-term budgets have increased the challenge of serving governments, Schwartz said. In May, Lion expanded a key product line for first-responders when it bought Safeguard America LLC, of Berlin, Wis., a manufacturer of protective gloves.

Lion's major competitors for first-responder customers are Morning Pride, part of Honeywell International Inc., and Globe Manufacturing Co. LLC, of Pittsfield, N.H. Morning Pride and Lion both still do some manufacturing in the Dayton area, including Lion's production of firefighter helmets at the National Composite Center in Kettering.

From the desk of John Nolan