



COMING FULL CIRCLE

HOW MIKE ORAZEN
FOLLOWED IN HIS
FATHER'S FOOTSTEPS
TO START ORAZEN
EXTRUDED POLYMERS

— Written by: Adam Richards



What is the American dream? Is it building something from nothing? Contributing to your community? Supporting your family? Or is it working hard every day alongside people you respect? For Mike Orazen of Orazen Extruded Polymers – it's all of the above.

From a young age, Mike knew the meaning of hard work. In 1984, his father, Michael Orazen Sr., started Extruded Polymers for Glazing (EPG). At age 14, Mike helped him move his first extruder

into a local business's building that had a couple thousand extra square feet of space. Over the coming years, he worked summers and weekends, assisting the family business in any way he could. Mike recalls: "He was harder on me at 16 years old than he was on his full-time employees." Mike didn't understand why at first and swore he'd never work in the family business.

Yet, over time, Mike began to realize the value of what his father was teaching

him. As he got his business degree from Miami University and continued to work every spring and summer at EPG, Mike added an internship at May Company. He engaged with May Company's new manager's training program. He quickly saw why his father demanded such an investment in the company from him.

"I realized that a lot of people really didn't care about what they were doing. They would hide from their responsibilities or try to get away with not really

making an impact. That was eye opening for me,” Mike recalls. “I wanted to find a job where I’d have some ability to help people and processes. Not put myself in a position where I wanted to hide or not give my best effort.”

From there, the work being done at EPG made sense, and upon graduation, he joined the family business full time. Initially working around the extrusion machines, Mike worked in operations, planning, and purchasing; ensuring he could capably do every job on the shop floor. He leaned into an innate desire to coach, pushing employees to feel invested in their job and the work they produce, and he complimented the engineering results oriented leadership of his father.

Through the mid-to-late ‘90s, Mike got his MBA at night, all while he transitioned into new business development for EPG. Mike credits his father for growing EPG at a constant double digit percentage each year. Along with his dad, Mike helped usher in a new era by expanding their staffing and product offerings from not only rubber, but also plastics all while

supporting their founding industries of glass and glazing. The business grew including more members of the Orazen extended family, all serving in roles that drove growth and built their capacity. By 2000, EPG became a \$13M/year company with Mike leading the family business.

Although EPG was doing well, the early 2000s were plagued by fears about the future of American manufacturing. Mike and his father felt this uncertainty deeply, as the family’s financial stability was entirely tied to the success of the company. His father was the son of immigrants, growing up in Euclid, Ohio as one of five kids in an 1,100 square foot house. The pride and dedication of building from so little, even during challenging times, was profoundly important to the family. Mike’s father’s gift to the family was stability. He had gifted each child with 19.5% ownership in EPG, ensuring their future fiscal stability and providing an inheritance to each of the children. So, as greater economic uncertainty set in, fears for the future mounted.

At the same time as these fears mounted,

some larger companies had taken notice of EPG’s success and offers for purchase began to arrive. Between the sound footing of the business, combined with Mike’s leadership philosophy and stamp of approval from his father - the dedication to keeping employees invested through profit sharing and building a sustainable and dedicated team for growth led to the offers.

One of the companies most interested in acquiring EPG was Trelleborg, a company out of Europe. After an attractive offer was made in the early 2000s, EPG was sold to Trelleborg, with Mike staying on at the helm, and other family members ensured their continued involvement and positions.

“They wanted to make an offer, we thought it was fair, and I wanted to make a difference for myself, my family and for the team at EPG,” Mike recounts. Over the next two years, Mike continued his work running EPG, traveling to Europe, growing the business, and working under the ownership of Trelleborg.





As the decade neared its halfway marker, Mike began to wonder what he was doing in manufacturing. His entrepreneurial spirit and longing to work in sports and coaching, a desire that was always present but often ignored, began to nag at him. Mike's three kids were in their years where he could coach them and he realized that he wanted to make a change, to start a facility where he could provide coaching, growth, and enrichment to children in his community.

So, in 2005, he stepped down from EPG – leaving the safety of the company he had worked for his whole adult life and run for nearly a decade. After assembling a small team of investors and business partners, Mike launched “The Edge,” a sports, training, and growth facility in Twinsburg. It was a complex that required investment and renovation, but fulfilled a dream and a goal that Mike gladly leveraged his own inheritance to achieve.

Unfortunately in 2007, the markets were quickly unkind and the economy tumbled. As this all occurred, Mike learned he was going to be a father for the fourth time. A joyful moment, but one that underlined the severity of the situation he was in. With little money,

no insurance, and a failing business – he leveraged the sale of The Edge to another investor and walked away from a business he once felt was his dream.

It was in 2011 that Mike found himself starting again in extruded polymers. He founded Orazen Extruded Polymers with the support of a loan from a banker, Jamie Brotherton – now a Senior Relationship Manager at Farmers National Bank. This small loan allowed Mike the freedom to begin again. Jamie assessed his business plan and looked at his history in extruded polymers. As Mike says, “I trusted her and she believed in me. Jamie helped advise me.” Jamie's preexisting relationship with Mike's father and confidence in his ability to perform in this next stage of his career allowed Mike to begin anew.

Orazen Extruded Polymers started as bootstrapped as a company could be. Through the first years, Mike did not pay himself a salary, instead reinvesting everything in his ability to build capacity. The company had no floor space, did not own its own machines, but instead was utilizing machines owned by friendly competitors of EPG. Mike recalls, “It was only me, alone, for the first year and a half – I was out drumming up business, growing relationships with suppliers and

sales reps. Then I'd run production on the machines myself. As the business grew, I'd pay some of these companies to run the production, then I'd come in to do the quality checks, label the product and get it out to my customers.”

This bootstrapping paid off, Orazen Extruded Polymers was soon profitable; and, Mike found himself in need of people he could grow the company with. He wasn't in a position yet to hire widely, nor did he want to take on business partners. For Mike, capacity building came from his years of coaching. After working with high school lacrosse and baseball players who were now studying in college, Mike recruited them. He offered stock appreciation rights in exchange for their help in Orazen's growth.

Together, they grew – with the help of Erica Began, who is part of the leadership team and has done everything from Accounting to Sales; Justin Zickel is Orazen's Operations Manager after starting with the company at 18; Sam Schilling is the Facilities and Design Engineer and has been with the company since he was 22; Zach Hruby, who has been with Orazen since college, is the comptroller; Tyler Zickel, an engineer; and Matt Glass, Mike's brother-in-law, who has been with Orazen for six years and is head of Sales.



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Throughout this time, the defining financial relationship for Orazen Extruded Polymers has been Farmers National Bank. Whether Mike is looking at yearly loans for capacity building and maintenance, engaging with Treasury Management services, countering the perils of the COVID pandemic and navigating PPP loans, or experiencing the joyful moment of buying Orazen's first building in 2019 – he has relied on Farmers banking services and council.

"We provide Private Banking, Treasury Management and other services to Orazen – we were proud to work with them in 2019 through the whole process of purchasing the building they're in today. It was wonderful to see how it enabled them to increase efficiencies and continue to grow," Brotherton says.

To Mike, the importance of this relationship is explained by this: "Farmers core values align with ours. Core values that you can truly believe-in, building relationships, and then taking care of those relationships every day."

For Farmers and Brotherton, it's about building relationships with their customers and helping them meet their goals.

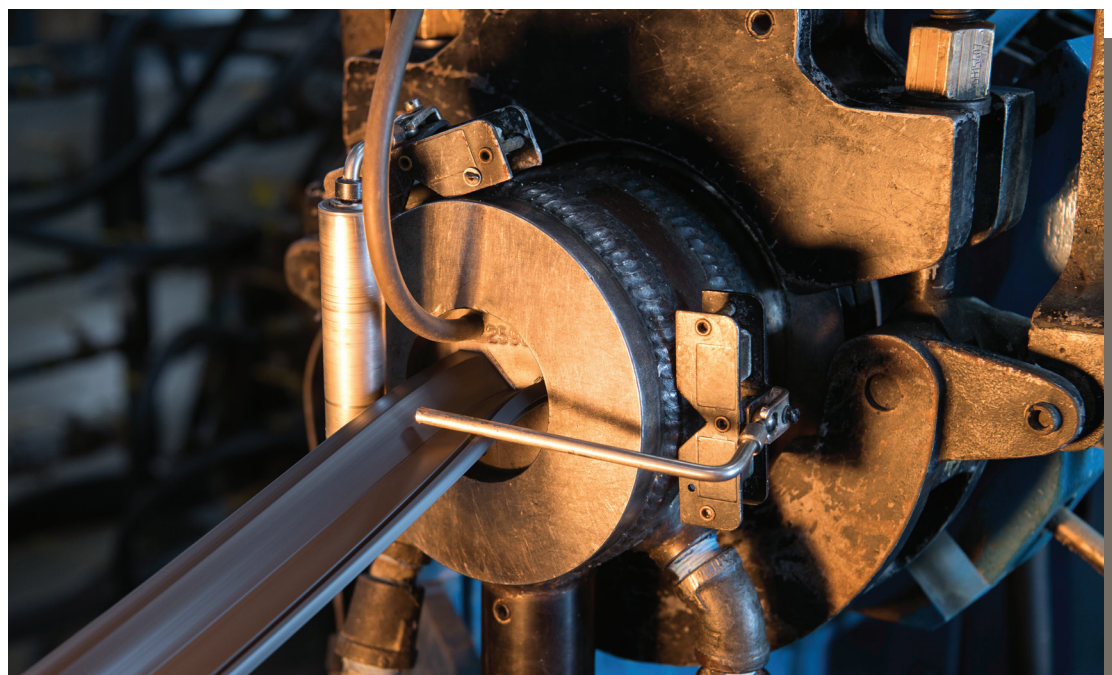
"Because Farmers is a community bank, we are very responsive to our customers' needs. We can react quickly, provide quick loan decisions, work on problem solving, and provide a compet-

itive edge to our customers and their financial decisions," Brotherton says.

Today, nearly 80% of Orazen Extruded polymers is staffed by folks who worked at EPG. Over time they've come back, wanting to be a part of a company dedicated to their work. Mike continues on his path of encouraging engagement in the company through profit sharing: his shop floor gets 10% of profits, something that's added on average \$5.50/hr to their pay. As well, 10% of profits are set aside for the salaried employees. The team of 35 turned out \$9.4M in sales in 2021, with a projection to hit \$14.5M in 2022. When asked about his success, Mike stresses how lucky he is,

saying, "Luck is a favorable coincidence of preparation and opportunity," after a pause, he adds, "Sometimes, I think it's a result of some failure, too."

With no plans to sell, a job he enjoys, and a team he has immense respect for – Mike Orazen has seen it all. As he says, "It's about people. Keep things simple. Motivate through a sense of ownership." Mike has certainly built that sense of ownership for himself and others. Starting again from nothing, working with and supporting his family, and raising his four children with his wife of 31 years, Mike Orazen can truly say, he's living the American dream.





COACHING AND LEARNING

Farmers is honored to be a part of the growth of Orazen Extruded Polymers. They've played a role in guiding and providing council through Orazen's over decade long streak of growth. In 2019, Farmers gave advice, assistance, and the loan as Mike purchased a building for the company. As well, they provided insights and PPP guidance through the COVID pandemic. As Mike says, "I know, and Farmers knows, you win with people."

"Farmers looks comprehensively at the customers

in our community. We consider more than just a snapshot – we look at owners and the company, their history and business plans. It allows us to find ways to form mutually beneficial partnerships within the community," Brotherton says.

Orazen Extruded Polymers has now grown to include a team that turns out \$14.5M/year in business. It's the lifeblood of many, some new to the industry, and some with decades of experience. For everyone, it's run based on a coaching mentality – you're

on a team, everyone's role is important, and the company wouldn't function properly without the work of any one member.

Today, Mike scratches his coaching itch by guiding, building and cheerleading his team at Orazen Extruded Polymers. Although it's not built around sports, Mike asserts, "I wish I'd completely understood when I was younger what I do now: I am a coach. Not on always on the field, but on a rubber shop floor."