

The Center for Design Excellence is the centerpiece of several new initiatives undertaken by the Precision Valve Corp., as part of the company's restructuring efforts. The Center and other key efforts are currently being directed by company President and CEO, John Abplanalp. Abplanalp, who was named President of the Yonkers, NY-based business in 1998, assumed additional responsibilities—including the title of CEO—in August 2003, with the passing of his father and company founder, Robert Abplanalp.

Robert Abplanalp, an aerosol industry pioneer, received a patent for the first mass-produced reusable aerosol valve in 1949, sparking the formation and rapid growth of Precision Valve—and the emergence of the aerosol prod-

business or service sectors and the regional managers. The CEO is quick to acknowledge their advice and input, stressing, "I couldn't do it without them—I really do count on their advice and input."

In August, *ST&M* spoke with Abplanalp, who shared both his vision for the company and some of the most recent projects. Precision Valve's new corporate philosophy is articulated in a mission statement, which points to customer focus, process excellence, and the company's workforce as the cornerstones for achieving success. It also touches on a host of possible new opportunities within pressurized packaging—through distribution, alliances, joint ventures, acquisitions and/or development and manufacturing.

performance, quality, and failure rate, with an eye to shifting energies from simply producing a commodity to creating product innovations. "We are using the expertise in this Center to say to our customers, 'We do more than just make valves. We can offer you *dispensing solutions*.' To do that, we have to be able to go in and ask the right questions of our multinational accounts: 'Where is it you want to go; what are your key issues; how can we deliver that?' This is really different from simply selling a product."

To solidify its business, the company has taken its existing global platform and reorganized it, establishing four regional managers and nine centralized support services, with some managers also assuming responsibility for specific services or business sectors. The

# Retooling with Precision

Center for Design Excellence is one of several new initiatives from Precision Valve.

uct form as a viable consumer product choice. From those early post-war years, the company grew substantially. During much of that time—some 54 years—Robert Abplanalp set the pace and focus of business, developing proprietary products, equipment and processes.

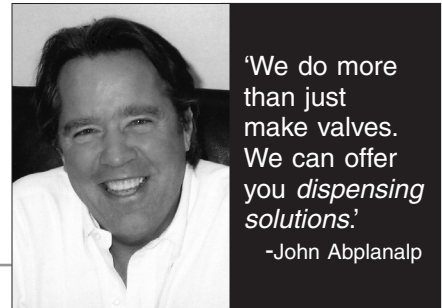
During many of those years, John had the opportunity to learn valve manufacturing from the ground up. He worked as an assembly maintenance mechanic after completing his undergraduate work. Later, after receiving his M.B.A., he moved into the corporate offices as a business analyst, eventually transferring to the United Kingdom for the startup of Precision Valve's UK subsidiary. Returning to the United States after the subsidiary was up and running, he spent the next several years in a variety of posts—including General Manager for the company's Plastics Division and Vice President of North American Operations—before becoming President.

Today, three years after assuming full responsibility for Precision Valve Corp., Abplanalp has settled comfortably into his new role, having established strategic initiatives which are helping to direct the business in the global marketplace. Working with him is a core group of advisors, consisting of the heads of the various

Although still in its early stages, the restructuring is beginning to produce benefits. "Our internal processes have already taken us to where our external failure rate is one-tenth of what it was several years ago. Because of that reliability, we are now able to synchronize our plant and reduce the lead time for products. In addition, with less in inventory, we have lower costs as well," states Abplanalp.

Overall, what has happened in the last several years—what has brought Precision Valve to where it is today—represents a new paradigm for the business, although it does incorporate the core equity of the 57 year old company—its proprietary products and processes. Among what is new with the company today is a redefined organizational structure for the manufacturer, which operates plants on six continents and in 20 countries and which produces, on a global basis, over four billion valves per year. This clearly defined business structure outlines a number of key services, including the Center for Design Excellence.

For Abplanalp, the Center for Design Excellence is all about moving Precision to new levels. Extending beyond actuators to all core componentry, the Center examines subjects, such as product design and development,



'We do more than just make valves. We can offer you *dispensing solutions*.'  
-John Abplanalp

global team is responsible, in part, for addressing issues of consolidation and expansion, and synchronization. In terms of key personnel, John Kawalchuk, Vice President and General Manager, oversees the North American market, which includes the US and Canada. Patrick Coutand is Regional Manager for Europe, which includes plants in Germany, France, Italy, Spain, the UK, and the Ukraine. Asia Pacific (including locations in Japan, Australia, South Africa, Singapore, India, China, South Korea and Thailand) is under the control of Regional Manager, Barry Connell. Finally, Latin America, where Precision has plants in Mexico, Argentina, Brazil and Venezuela, is managed by Juan Vidal.

In addition to his regional responsibilities, General Manager and VP Kawalchuk also has key responsibilities in supply chain and manufacturing. Business development is headed by Al Lustrino, while sales are done regionally and by key account. Research and development and product development is managed by Paul Morgan. Other key sectors of business include: continuous improvement, headed by J. Ellingwood; information technology, supervised by F. Faranda; human resources, directed by R. Reto; and finance, led by A. Mariani. These centralized services consider issues such as product line expansion, emerging markets, sales force effectiveness, process capabilities, accuracy, cost reduction, and of course, the challenges of even tighter bell curves. **SPRAU**