

Bellingham engineering firm reports revenue growth, hiring

ANNA WALTERS - THE BELLINGHAM HERALD

Each week, The Bellingham Herald takes a close look at a construction project or checks in with a business in Whatcom County. This week: Fiberglass Structural Engineering, Inc.

WHATS NEW

Fiberglass Structural Engineering is one of the few companies prospering right now: the 33-year-old Bellingham company boasted a 35 percent revenue increase in January, compared to January last year, said CEO Chris Renoud.



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So, how is the company immune to the economic woes facing many other businesses? The ubiquity of fiberglass in commercial operations - from piping for offshore oil drilling to chemical storage tanks - is one of the reasons the company has been able to expand the past few years, instead of making cuts.

"We work a lot with the Fortune 500 companies, and we're somewhat flexible, so we can move from certain industries to others," Renoud said. "Whatever industry is hot at the moment, we can focus on that and stay busy. Some people are just stuck in one industry, but we're not."

WHAT IT DOES

FSE designs fiberglass structures and equipment, such as storage tanks and piping systems for industrial giants like Shell and ExxonMobil, among others. Fiberglass, which doesn't easily corrode, is becoming the industry standard, Renoud said.

OWNERSHIP

Renoud recently bought the company from his father, Winston Renoud, who plans to retire in a few years.

Chris Renoud grew up in Bellingham, got his mechanical engineering degree and worked for his father for 14 years, first in the engineering department and then as general manager. He's taking evening classes at Western Washington University right now, earning a master's degree in business administration.

EMPLOYEES

FSE employs 38 people, and is looking to hire a few more hands in the sales and inspections departments.

CLAIM TO FAME

FSE is one of the largest companies that specializes in fiberglass engineering for industry giants. As a result, Renoud gets some pretty hefty requests.

"Fiberglass in the industrial setting is kind of new," Renoud said. "Every time we turn around we seem to be doing something that's the largest in the world."

For example, according to Renoud, FSE is currently engineering the largest-ever fiberglass scrubber, a piece of equipment that cleans emissions from coal power plants before releasing fumes into the atmosphere.

SOURCES: Chris Renou, CEO

Fiberglass Structural Engineering, Inc.

316 E. McLeod Rd.

Bellingham, WA 98226

734-7040