

## FOCUS ON GREEN CONSTRUCTION/DESIGN

# Company's energy saving cladding goes global

By **STEVE REINBRECHT**  
Special for Lehigh Valley Business

An Allentown company is ready to storm the world with a 25-year-old technology, saying that markets from Israel to Japan to the U.S. are ripe for its simple, undeniably green product.

ATAS International Inc. has hired two people to promote Inspire, which is a thin, perforated metal cladding designed to inexpensively help heat and cool large buildings.

The cladding is mounted a few inches from a south-facing wall. The sun heats the metal, which warms the air in the space between the cladding and the building. That warm air is sucked into the building's HVAC system and is replaced by fresh air drawn through the perforations.

The system also recaptures heat loss from the building, according to an ATAS brochure. Energy savings will recoup the expense in three to eight years, ATAS said.

Craig Cigas installed Inspire at his 73,000-square-foot machine shop in Pottstown. The company pays little or nothing to heat the building in the winter, and Inspire keeps the building cool in the summer, he said.

"It literally paid for itself in a season," Cigas said.

## INTERNATIONAL FOCUS

Although Inspire is catching on slowly in America, the company has especially targeted the rest of the world, where other countries have higher levels of awareness and interest in energy-saving technology, said Martin



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Heating and cooling costs were nearly eliminated after black Inspire cladding was installed on this 73,000-square-foot machine shop in Pottstown.

Misenhimer, the company's sustainable building-products manager who was hired this year.

João C. DaCosta, the new international business development manager at ATAS, has signed up distributors in Turkey, Israel, Japan, Colombia, Central America and Canada.

DaCosta, a native of Brazil, said the Inspire technology can be used to dry many products, including coffee, sugar cane, compost, fruit, corn, tea, cocoa, nuts, spices, grain and coconut.

A business in India is interested in drying paint on cars. Other possibilities are drying scuba equipment and fire hoses.

## PROJECTED JUMP IN SALES

In its 50th anniversary year, ATAS is prepared to ramp up production. Sales will increase dramatically over the next year, Misenhimer predicted.

In the first three quarters of 2013, sales of

Inspire outpaced those in all of 2012 by more than 35 percent. Based on projects already in the pipeline, sales in 2014 will more than double year over year.

ATAS executives are not alone in seeing the potential.

"I would agree that the technology is poised for substantial worldwide growth (and I would note that there are systems in operation now in 30-plus countries around the world)," Victoria Hollick, a director of the Solar Air Heating World Industry Association and principal of Conserval Systems Inc., wrote in an email.

"The energy and economic benefits that solar air-heating technologies provide are tremendous, and there needs to be strong policies in place that allow for it to have a level playing field with other solar technologies," she wrote. "When that happens, you will see exponential growth in the technology."

## LAUDED BY GOVERNMENTS

Conserval Engineering, based in Toronto, invented the technology 25 years ago. ATAS manufactured it for Conserval for years before developing its own, slightly different product – Inspire – about 10 years ago, Misenhimer said.

ATAS has about 130 employees, with about 80 at two locations in Allentown and the rest in Maryville, Tenn., and Mesa, Ariz.

Companies that install the solar air-heating technology often get incentives from governments and utilities. They can get a 30-percent

credit off the top with the federal Business Energy Investment Tax Credit. Pennsylvania electric companies provide Sustainable Energy Fund grants and loans.

Even the federal government is behind the technology.

"Transpired collectors provide the most-reliable, best-performing and lowest-cost solar heating for commercial and industrial buildings available on the market today," according to the U.S. Department of Energy's National Renewable Energy Laboratory.

Inspire helps buildings get Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design designation. The LEED program provides third-party verification of green buildings and is especially attractive for higher-education and military buildings.

## TARGETED PUSH

So why has it been rough going, selling it in America? Misenhimer said the company has about 40 installations under its belt.

"A lot of people scratch their heads as to why it hasn't made a bigger impact in the market," he said.

One reason the air-heating concept is less known is that photovoltaic technology – generating electricity with solar panels – is sexier and attracts more interest and support, Misenhimer said.

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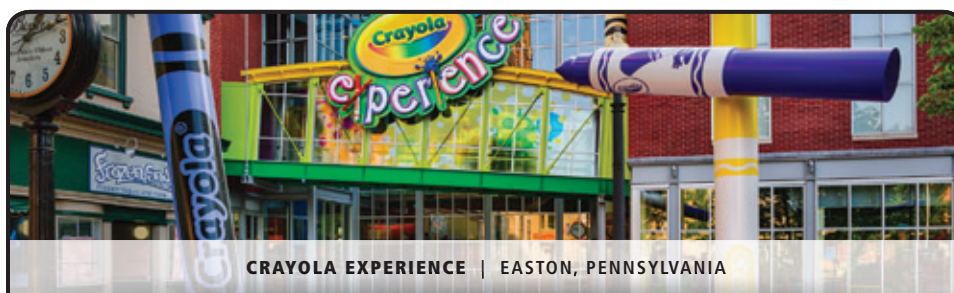
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