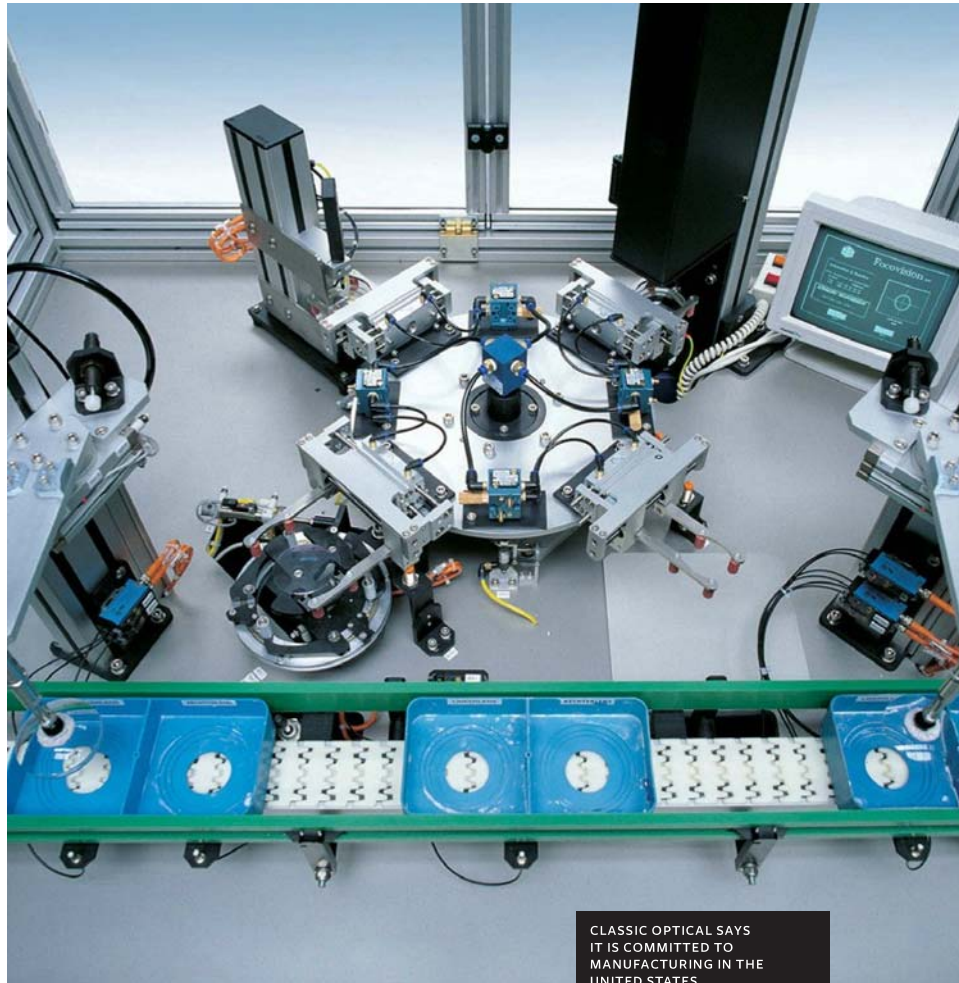


CLASSIC OPTICAL LABORATORIES INC.

www.classicoptical.com / HQ: Youngstown, Ohio / 2010 sales: \$14 million / Products: Prescription eyeglasses / Dawn Friedkin, COO:

"We have the systems, technology, equipment and personnel in place to continue to be very successful manufacturing exceptional eyeglasses."



CLASSIC OPTICAL SAYS
IT IS COMMITTED TO
MANUFACTURING IN THE
UNITED STATES.

SECOND TO NONE

CLASSIC OPTICAL IS A MAJOR EYEWEAR MANUFACTURER FOR THE PRIVATE SECTOR AND GOVERNMENT. BY ALAN DORICH

After 41 years, Classic Optical Laboratories Inc. is a firm that remains fully committed to manufacturing its products in America, COO Dawn Friedkin says. "We believe in our associates," she declares. "We feel that they are second-to-none as professional optical technicians and they have been vital to making Classic Optical the world-class laboratory it is today."

Based in Youngstown, Ohio, Classic Optical supplies prescription lenses, contacts and industrial eyewear prod-

ucts to clients in the optical and manufacturing sectors, and government programs. Friedkin's father, President Monte Friedkin, started the company in 1970, manufacturing prescription eyewear for local eye care providers who met their patients' needs for eyeglass fabrication.

Classic Optical provided a vital solution in response to the growth in states' eyeglass programs in the 1980s and 1990s. At the time, state agencies were spending large amounts on glasses for

Medicaid recipients.

Classic Optical showed the states how they could stretch their dollars further by utilizing the company's central lab in Youngstown, Friedkin says. "Thus began one of the first direct state volume purchase programs," she says.

Along with creating eyeglasses, Classic Optical developed online systems that streamlined operations for eyewear providers. In the last 20 years, the company has saved state agencies and the federal government millions of dollars through these programs, she says.

"With Classic's proven program interventions, we help states maintain or enhance their current benefit levels without increasing the cost," Friedkin says. "We also guarantee uniformity of high-quality products and services for all patients, regardless of geography, or urban vs. rural settings."

SEAMLESS TRANSITIONS

Manufacturing efficiencies have been another area of focus for Classic Optical. "Continuous quality improvement using the integration of Six Sigma has enabled us to both implement and fully utilize the latest technologies of the market today," Friedkin says.

For example, to most efficiently manage the mass production processes of Classic Optical's custom products, the company worked closely with its vendors and it has transformed its lab into an automated facility. Working with the Friedkins and its engineering and maintenance team, Rodney Remsey, director of laboratory operations for Classic Optical, spearheaded the automation evolution to see the business transform from a manual laboratory to an automated laboratory. This dramatically increases capacity, without the need for additional personnel.

Additionally, Classic Optical works with its vendors to create rollout strategies for new technologies that they supplied to the company. For instance, to use some of the latest products from FlexLink, such as spiral elevators, the

company helped Classic Optical make optimal use of its space while keeping walkways clear by using the vertical clearance above the manufacturing equipment.

The spirals can be more cost-effective than vertical elevators, as they do not require any automation or control and consequently have a very low maintenance requirement. Each stage of the conveyor installation in the laboratory was installed by the FlexLink installation team, who were “absolutely tremendous to work with,” Ramsey says. “They managed to minimize disruption to production, while working long hours to get the system online as quickly as possible.”

“WE FEEL THAT [OUR ASSOCIATES] ARE SECOND-TO-NONE AS PROFESSIONAL OPTICAL TECHNICIANS AND THEY HAVE BEEN VITAL TO MAKING CLASSIC OPTICAL [WHAT] IT IS.” -Dawn Friedkin

“We work with vendors that have a history of delivering for us, so that we can deliver for our customers,” Friedkin says. “We have found that the better the preparation ... the more abbreviated the learning curve.”

From the raw material side, Classic Optical never introduces a new frame or lens vendor into a new program. Instead, the company wants the comfort of and confidence in the vendor’s ability to deliver before Classic Optical’s relies on it with its customers. Classic Optical specific requirements on inventory levels, lead times and manufacturing tolerances are integral to its success and it holds its vendors to them,

FlexLink Systems, Inc. is delighted to be Classic Optical Laboratories’ first choice for their production logistic needs. The two companies have been working together since 2007 and will continue to do business as Classic grows and expands. Dramatically increasing Classic Optical’s volume of manufacturing with unique conveyor layouts including spiral elevators and floor saving solutions, FlexLink has also been able to reduce their labor costs. Although serving many industries such as FMCG, Electronics, Solar and more, unique to the optical industry is FlexLink’s ‘smart routing’ software which ensures the right jobs go to the correct processes which has further increased production efficiency for Classic Optical. For more information, call 610-973-8200, e-mail info.us@flexlink.com or visit www.flexlink.com.

with no exceptions.

On the manufacturing equipment side, the introduction of any new system or technology in the lab entails a well-planned rollout strategy that is formulated in partnership with the respective vendor. These partnerships feature “a detail-

ed implementation plan, one that lays out with specificity what is required from initial introduction through activation, and an integrated team approach,” Friedkin says. “We have been successful in minimizing challenges and ensuring the ease for executing error-free start-ups. Most of »



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FlexLink is listening. We've taken your feedback and are excited to offer a brand new conveyor technology that you can afford. Simple modular installation, lower noise and elimination of pneumatics are just a few of the improvements with Vision X. Every component or system we design, every valuable service we offer is geared towards your productivity and the success of your business. Contact us today at info.us@flexlink.com or give us a call at +610-973-8200.

www.flexlink.com

» our vendor partners laud our team of longtime lab engineers, maintenance technicians, and the breadth and depth of the resident optical skill, making us the easiest lab to deal with.”

NAVIGATING THE LANDSCAPE

As the optical industry consolidates, Friedkin observes, “There has been a trend on the part of many labs to utilize offshore facilities to provide various fabrication services, as well as the potential impact to the industry from the pending reforms in healthcare – all of which have fueled an increasingly competitive landscape.”

Classic Optical does not send work overseas, Friedkin says. “We believe that eyeglasses are medical devices and should not be taken overseas [since quality and turnaround may suffer],” she explains.

The recession also has put downward pricing pressure on the optical industry. “At the same time, there has been considerable upward movement on the cost of raw materials, as well as

increasingly steep price tags on sophisticated technologies and superior equipment,” she says.

“These factors have made efficient manufacturing more important than ever before,” she continues. “To realize that objective, Classic Optical invested heavily to compete now and into the future. Utilizing our leading-edge robotics, advanced and robust IT systems, and by automating many production functions [and] leveraging our vast volume-purchasing power, we have been able to maintain our position at the forefront of offering the highest quality of products in the most cost-effective manner.

“We believe we have the perfect combination of automation, robotics and skilled craftspeople to maintain our niche as the preeminent, high-volume manufacturer of custom eyeglass products,” she says.

AT A TURNING POINT

Classic Optical is planning for a future that reflects its past, Friedkin says. “For

COMMUNICATING VALUE

Classic Optical Laboratories’ marketing efforts aim to make governmental agencies, managed care companies and other organizations aware of its value proposition. “To accomplish these objectives,” COO Dawn Friedkin says, “we are communicating [about] the full-service capabilities we offer via direct targeted communication and Internet-based vehicles, such as email, our website and social media, as well as utilizing traditional outreach via our field staff.”

example, the past 10 years have brought faster product information, greater speed to market and numerous technological breakthroughs,” she says, adding that trend will continue. “In the optical industry specifically, the last few years have been truly exciting, and as a result, we are really at a major turning point.”

New technologies “that were not in existence a few years back have made possible full automation and robotics, which are a must to ensure efficient manufacturing, high-quality products and cost-effective production,” Friedkin continues. “Digital surfacing is also relatively new and is revolutionizing the way Classic Optical operates, enabling a reduction in inventory [and] expanded product offerings.”

Its adoption of these technologies will allow the company to continue to expand in the next five to 10 years. “We have the systems, technology, equipment and personnel in place to continue to be very successful manufacturing exceptional eyeglasses in the most cost-effective manner,” Friedkin says.

“We have the infrastructure and proven workforce in place, comprised of a very strong pool of talented and skilled workers,” Friedkin continues. “At Classic, our associates are the foundation of our success, and this team of committed professionals has and will continue to make Classic Optical an industry leader in the future.” **mt**



THE CLASSIC OPTICAL LAB IS TRULY STATE-OF-THE-ART, CLEAN, EFFICIENT AND WELL MANAGED.