



Corporation®

2011

Annual Report

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If Not Now,  
When? *The Case for B Corp*

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## Cascade Engineering is Big and Thinks Bigger

A western Michigan plastics firm with deep roots in the automotive industry might not sound like an obvious candidate for B Corporation certification. However, Cascade Engineering, a 37-year-old family of nearly a dozen manufacturing and marketing companies that employs over 1,000 people, is a leading example of old industry taking its place in the new green economy.

"Fred Keller is the Ray Anderson you've never heard of," says Jay Coen Gilbert, cofounder of B Lab, referring to Interface's widely known leader.

For Cascade, B Corporation principles were not a radical shift from its core principles—"the three Ps: people, planet and profit," says Chief Administrative Officer Kenyatta Brame. So when Cascade Engineering received its B Corporation certification this October, it didn't so much mark a change as the next step.

As an engineer working for a big firm in Grand Rapids, Mich., Keller saw his colleagues trying to get ahead—at any cost to the environment and their coworkers—and he didn't like it. "From the beginning, Fred wanted to start a company that treated people with dignity," says Brame. Over the years Cascade has translated respect for workers into things like the Welfare-to-Career Program, which brings people off welfare and into its workforce, and the Health Horizons wellness program, which offers its employees reductions in health care costs in return for documented healthy activity.

Founded in 1973, Cascade Engineering soon started manufacturing injection-molded products for automotive and commercial furniture markets with a strong focus on lean manufacturing and innovation. Today, that lean, innovative ethic translates into resource efficiency that supports the company's ongoing sustainability initiatives. Since 2005, the company has reduced greenhouse gas emissions, water use, and landfill waste and increased its use of recycled materials. In 2007, the company's corporate headquarters were certified as LEED Platinum by the U.S. Green Building Council, and Cascade has been recognized by the State of Michigan as a Clean Corporate Citizen.

Cascade grew significantly during the mid-1980s, when business was booming for the Big Three automakers and for its manufacturing partner

Herman Miller, another large western Michigan company with industry-leading sustainability practices. The company has now diversified into a wide range of industries, from transportation to renewable energy, high tech and waste management.

*"Fred Keller is the Ray Anderson you've never heard of."*

Several new efforts extend the company's commitment to sustainability: The Swift Wind Turbine, a 1.5-kilowatt rooftop turbine, is the first quiet, structure- or pole-mounted turbine to enter the marketplace. It can be used in residential, commercial or industrial settings and is notable for its quietness, aesthetic, minimal vibration and simple installation; the HydrAid BioSand Water Filter, which was developed in partnership with International Aid to bring affordable clean water to emerging markets; and Quest Sustainable Solutions, a consulting firm that trains other companies in corporate culture, workforce diversity, environmental management, leadership development, safety and sustainability.

As one of the first large B Corporation manufacturers, the company knows it has a unique opportunity to educate its suppliers and contractors about what it means to be a B Corp. Cascade plans to use the B Corp platform to lead beyond its supply chain and industry. In fact, Keller has been helpful in getting Benefit Corp legislation introduced in Michigan (see p 15-18). Keller's ability to convene influential business leaders and get the ear of political leaders on both sides of the aisle has been crucial to building the coalition needed to pass legislation to make good old Michigan a leader of the new economy.

According to Keller, "B Corp is an important part of our plan for sustainable economic development in western Michigan and, for that matter, the whole state of Michigan. This is an opportunity for Michigan to lead the rest of the country." ©