

PK USA prepares for future after weathering tough past May 18, 2018



On the manufacturing floor at PK USA, a one-ton spool of rolled steel was hoisted by overhead crane and sent on its way to become stamped metal parts.

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If staying ahead in the game is the key to winning a competition, then PK USA looks to be in front.

On the day TSN interviewed Masakazu Nakayama, president and CEO of PK USA, Ford Motor Co. announced it was discontinuing all but two of its North American car models.

PK USA, which makes axle tubes and other auto parts, had already begun shifting its focus, said Nakayama.

“We have seen growth in auto sales,” he said, though many have been saying sales peaked last year. “I still see 16 to 17 years of steady demand.”

However, PK USA, 600 Northridge Drive, which is celebrating 30 years in Shelbyville this year, has moved away from parts production for sedans.

Previously, the company’s product output was divided about 50-50 between parts for SUVs and pickups, and parts for automobiles. Now the ratio is 75-25, Nakayama said, in favor of the former.

Ford’s announcement that it will stop making all car models in North America except the Mustang and the Focus is just good business, he said.

“This is what auto companies do to maximize profits,” Nakayama said.

And after 14 years working at PK’s facility in Shelbyville, he knows first-hand about the challenges the automotive business can face.

When the economy skidded off the road in the Great Recession about 10 years ago, PK USA’s local work force dwindled to about 250 employees, said Bill Kent, vice president, corporate relations.

Now they’re at 600 full-time workers, he said.

After weathering those challenges, Nakayama was promoted to his current position in 2014.

However, recovering from the recession has produced a new challenge – finding qualified workers, especially tough in the auto industry where there is a lot of competition, he said.

“I think it’s the same in most industries,” Nakayama said.

To meet the challenge, PK USA is starting a new apprentice program to train workers for highly in-demand positions.

“Especially, it targets die maintenance technicians,” Nakayama said.

During the 2008-09 recession, die maintenance programs at the “big three” automakers went away which has led to a shortage of workers in that specialty, Kent said.

The four-year program PK USA is launching will be open only to current employees, at least at first, he said.

In his off hours, Nakayama, who lives in Shelbyville, enjoys grilling out in the summer, “almost every day,” and traveling.

Japan has nothing like Yellowstone National Park, he said.

And he sees a strong future ahead for PK USA in Shelbyville.

“We very much desire to stay,” Nakayama said.