



Fall 2022 Issue • Innovations

## Working Together

Employee-owned D&M Industries lets no challenge impede its ability to serve clients.

Grace Bureau  
August 25, 2022  
5 min read

The executive team at [D&M Industries](#) is looking for every efficiency to keep pace with its explosive growth. But after 40 years of manufacturing doors, frames, hardware and windows, most observers think the secret sauce of its success lies in the fact that it is 100% employee-owned.

“You just look for the little things you can do to help the flow go more smoothly,” Brad Wischnak, vice president of operations, says.

The purpose of upgrading old equipment, finding new uses for automation, or streamlining manufacturing processes is always about making the work easier, never to replace someone’s job.

“We try to make the job as easy as we can so people are not physically exhausted at the end of the day, and they want to come back to work the next day,” Wischnak says.



The company has added 26,000 square feet of warehouse space since 2020 to keep up with demand.

D&M’s newest technological additions include an automated exterior door line and a door milling machine.

“The big thing is continuous improvement,” company president Brian Becker says. “Whether it’s the procurement of the product or bidding of commercial jobs, we’re constantly looking for efficiencies.”

Originally named for its service of North and South Dakota (D) and Minnesota (M), D&M opened its doors in Fargo in 1982 with seven employees, one of whom still works at the company. It soon expanded to residential products and grew its physical presence to keep up with its growth, building more office space, warehouses, and production shops.

Chasing larger facilities, it moved across the river to Moorhead, Minn., in 2006, consolidating sales, production, and administrative functions into one 65,000-square-foot building (though an additional 43,000-square-foot warehouse was later added). Today, D&M also has operations in two Wisconsin communities due to its 2018 acquisition of Capital Finishing. Though most of the company’s residential work is confined to the Midwest, D&M serves customers nationally. A recent order from Alaska means that it has shipped products to 49 of America’s 50 states — all but Hawaii.

The company has added 26,000 square feet of warehouse space since 2020 to keep up with demand. Now employing about 175 people, the company’s leaders hope to be at 185 by the end of the year. With signing bonuses, referral bonuses, and a successful partnership with a job placement organization for drug and alcohol recovery, they’re confident they can raise their numbers.

Many people credit D&M’s employee ownership structure for its ability to navigate sometimes rough waters.

“We’re working for each other,” Becker says. “That’s the glue that keeps us together.”

D&M became fully employee-owned in 2006, which means each employee is truly invested in the success of the company, according to CFO Dan Otto.

“That’s part of what do you as an employee-owned company, you do what needs to get done. There’s no ‘that’s not my job’ in a company where you’re part of the ownership group. And people are definitely willing to do that,” Otto says.



During 2021, D&M’s rapid increases in sales occasionally threatened to exceed its production capabilities. During especially busy times, employee-owners from all areas of the company would head to the shop floor after their normal shifts ended. The company even held occasional “blitz weekends,” in which employee-owners volunteered to spend the weekend helping build doors and ship orders.

“We would have anywhere from 20-30 people and 300 exterior doors to make,” Wischnak says. What would normally take weeks took just a weekend. “Those are the types of things we were willing to do to get the job done.”

Wischnak has been with the company for 25 years, starting as a 22-year-old machining operator. He credits D&M’s success to the company’s policy of always saying “yes” to customers. If a client wanted a new type of product, he says, they made it happen; if they had never before shipped to the client’s location, the company adapted.

Otto also cites the strong relationships they’ve cultivated with partners and clients.

“We’ve had customers who have been here since the beginning,” Otto says. “We like to think about D&M as a company that builds multi-decade partnerships with customers and vendors.”

It’s hoped that D&M’s future will include more acquisitions like the 2018 Capital Finishing expansion. And although growth is on everyone’s mind, leadership prioritizes long-term, sustainable progress above all else.

“Our strategy is about growing the core business,” Otto says. “We want to maintain profitability during these tough economic times.”

“D&M is a special company,” he adds. “We don’t like to toot our own horn; we quietly do what we need to do in order to service our projects. But it really is amazing being a part of a company that is 100% employee-owned. We’re not working for some nameless shareholder; we’re working for the person to the left of us and the person to the right of us.”