

Columbia Elevator's Acquisition of EISol

by Ralph M. Newman



Columbia's New York plant

Columbia Elevator Solutions LLC, an affiliate of Columbia Elevator Products of Port Chester, New York, has acquired Elevator Solutions (EISol) of Strother Field Industrial Park, Arkansas City, Kansas (ELEVATOR WORLD, January 2008). Launched in 1967 by Chairman Louis Blaiotta, Sr., Columbia began in the elevator industry by manufacturing and distributing elevator cabs, entrances and architectural parts at its Port Chester, New York headquarters.

Louis "LJ" Blaiotta, Jr., Columbia's president, expounded upon the company's history:

"However. . . certain steps became necessary. First, we went to a double shift, but that benefited us for only so long. As demand continued to grow, we had sufficient work to require four shifts, which we could not accommodate at our existing facility. The solution was the opening of our second location in Miami, focusing on making



EISol's Kansas plant

cabs in Florida and entrances in New York. Our next move was to seek an operation in the central U.S. to better serve the heartland. Acquiring [EISol] is an ideal fulfillment of this objective."

The history of Elevator Solutions dates back further than that of Columbia – to the 1950s, when Charlie Loomis began manufacturing architectural elevator products under the name of Western Manufacturing. Loomis eventually sold his operation to Montgomery Elevator, which in turn sold it to KONE Elevator. During the late 1990s, the facility was sold again, to the German company Wittur,

which continued operations until January 2004, when the enterprise was forced into bankruptcy. In July of that year, Principals John Mann and Tom Rennick, and previous Senior Managers Steve Smith, Rocky Strange and Jerre Williams were able to structure an arrangement with creditors and reopen the facility under the name of Elevator Solutions International, Inc.

EISol recently developed a quality line of linear operators for low-use, limited access and residential applications, and had an expansion into commercial applications in

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EISol's Finn Power Punching Machine

the works. A primary advantage to Columbia is that EISol has been in the business of manufacturing entrances, doors, cabs and door-operator equipment. These offerings are similar to Columbia's business model, while offering additional products that Columbia hopes will serve to broaden its line and "convenience factor." Columbia intends to offer EISol's full line of harmonic and linear door operators, tracks and hangers to its customers.

Another advantage to Columbia is EISol's central location in Kansas, providing Columbia with a significantly broadened footprint in terms of delivery service. Eighty percent of the North American population will now be within 500 miles of one of Columbia's factories, providing its customers vastly expanded delivery options in the heartland region and beyond. Furthermore, Columbia is now extending its reach into the Canadian market, taking advantage of EISol's Canadian sales office in the greater Toronto area, one of Canada's largest elevator markets.

Concerning the residential elevator market and his company's future, Blaiotta, Jr. explains:

*"Our target customers – the elevator contractors – are becoming increasingly aware of the new marketplace opening up to them. . . Our customers have traditionally addressed exclusively the **commercial** marketplace, while residential elevators (with manual gates and doors) have been offered primarily by handicapped-accessibility companies that also make [stairlifts] and wheel-chair lifts. Now that the need for residential elevators is creating the fastest-growing segment of the vertical-transportation industry. . . our customers are increasingly 'out there' aggressively marketing this product. Columbia's expanded new structure will help us serve this dynamic segment of the business in the coming months and years.*

"The benefits of this acquisition are many for manufacturer and customer alike. This coming together of. . . Columbia's locations in New York and Florida, and EISol in the Midwest provides more than a century of combined experience and innovation. . . [while] centrally engineering and scheduling jobs into the closest or quickest factory. This reduces costs and delivery time for our customers and gives them a significant competitive edge."

"Blaiotta, Jr. has named Tom Rennick vice president of Sales & Marketing of Columbia's new venture, while Steve Smith, Rocky Strange and Jerre Williams continue in their current capacities as EISol senior managers. John Mann has stepped down as EISol's president and CEO. Both companies have strategic alliances with Fermator of Spain to supply its door-operator technology and components to the North American market.

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Tom Rennick



Jerre Williams



Louis Blaiotta, Sr.



Steve Smith



Rocky Strange



EISol's Dustin Hamm programming the Finn machine