

Growth and technology the keys to success for F & P America

Subframe Robotic Mig Welding at F&P America, a World Class, Tier-One International Automotive Systems Supplier, and now Troy's largest industrial employer. B2B Staff photo by Jim Witmer

F&P America's products can be found on Hondas, Acuras and the GM Equinox. "Going forward our business is very strong, very stable," said Managing Director David Harrison. »

By Nancy Bowman
Contributing Writer

TROY — F&P America has become Troy's largest industrial operation with close to 1,000 associates at its automotive parts plant.

The company's "bread and butter" is suspension systems for Honda North America and pedal assemblies, said David Harrison, F&P America managing director. Approximately 5,000 car suspension sets are produced daily.

F&P America products can be found on the Honda Accord, Civic and CRV; Acura TL; Acura RDX; and the GM Equinox.

Business has grown from \$30 million in 1994 to \$350 million over the past 19 years.

Keys to the company's successes and expansion since its opening in 1994 in Troy have been Honda's North American growth and new technologies development, said David Harrison, F&P America managing director.

The latest achievement was new friction stir welding technology developed with Honda for use in the 2013-model Honda Accord.

That technology with the welding of steel and aluminum "has never been done before in mass production. F&P and Honda have achieved this now for the new Accord," Harrison said.

Jim Dando, Troy's economic development director, reported to city officials earlier this year that F&P had become the city's largest employer.

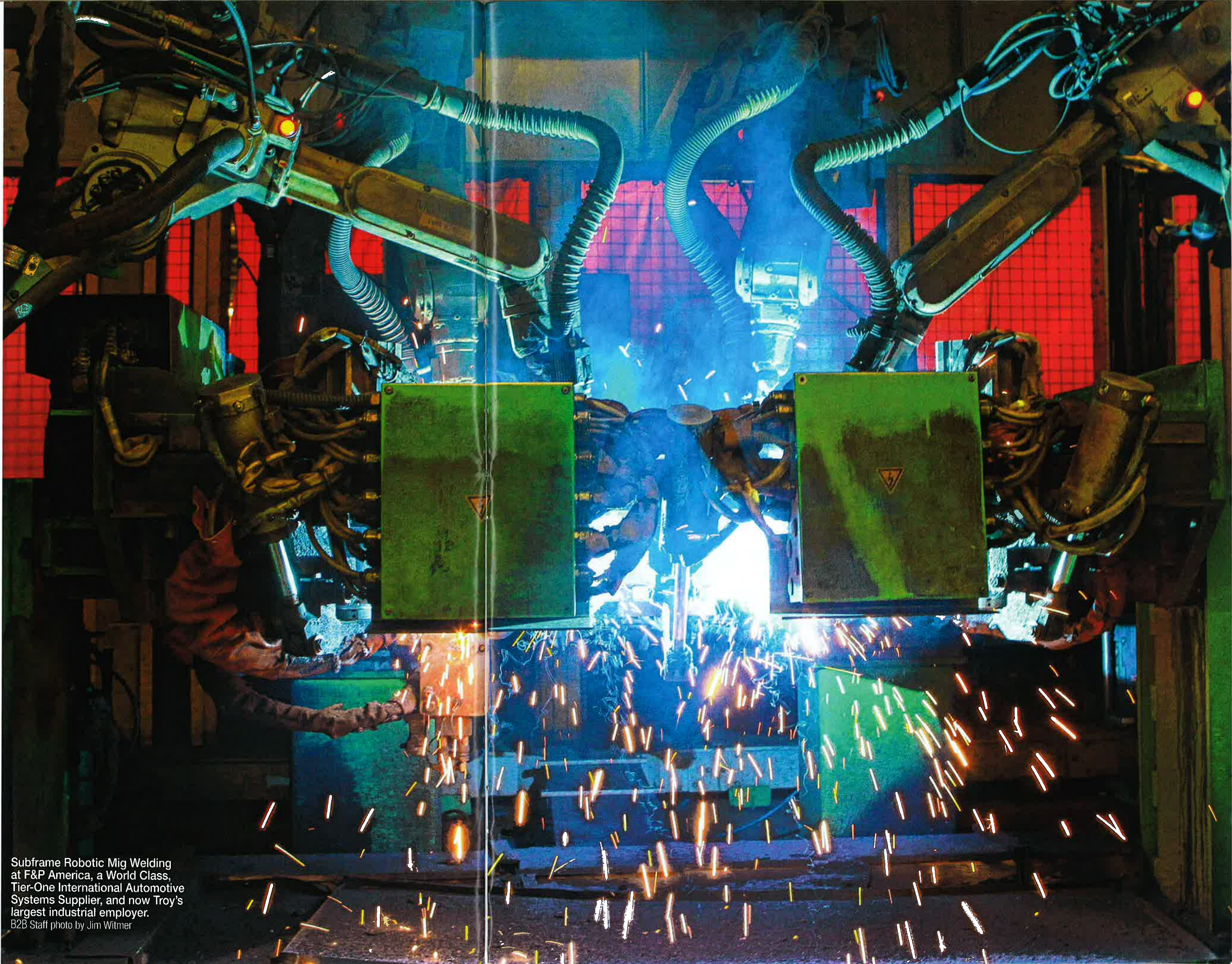
When the company arrived in 1993, the city expected less than 50 employees, Dando said.

"The company's progress is largely due to Honda's U.S. sales growth but also due to the product improvement and engineering F&P continues today," Dando said.

"Their expertise in making lighter, yet stronger automobile chassis parts fits perfectly with the welding and metal working skills that are so prevalent in our Troy workforce. F&P is inventing important parts of the automobile and manufacturing technologies of the future," he said.

Background and facilities

The company's parent, F-Tech, was started in Japan in 1947. Its early busi- »



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Detail of Honda CRV pedal components waiting to be assembled at F&P America, a World Class, Tier-One International Automotive Systems Supplier, and now Troy's largest industrial employer.
B2B Staff photo by Jim Witmer



(Left to right): Kenichi Ando, President; David Harrison, Managing Director, and Delane Sloan, Senior Manager, Human Resources at F&P America, Troy's largest industrial employer. The company has more than 5,400 employees worldwide. B2B Staff photo by Jim Witmer

ness was supporting Honda motorcycles, and then growing with Honda throughout the world.

The company has multiple factories along with engineering and development centered in Japan. Six facilities are located in North America, two each in the U.S., Canada and Mexico. Manufacturing locations in the U.S. are in Troy and Rome, Ga.

Worldwide employment is more than 5,400. The parent company has about \$1.6 billion in sales annually, about one-half in North America.

Of the customer base, 82 percent is Honda. The balance is GM, Nissan and others.

Troy also is home to FTech R&D, North America, which opened in 2003 and is located off Ohio 55 just west of Interstate 75. The center's more than 60 engineers support North American operations.

Major technology used by the company includes two 5,000-ton hydroforming presses to form subframe base components, multiple stamping presses from 160 ton to 3,000 tons and close to 1,000 robots for spot and mig welding along with material handling. »



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Growth and challenges

Production at the facility was for the Accord until 2002 when Civic production was added, increasing the number of associates to around 500. As Honda grew with the CRV and RDX, employment grew to around 700 associates. A contract with GM for the Equinox boosted numbers more.

The biggest challenges for the operation during the past five years have been the economic downturn and the 2011 tsunami in Japan, Harrison and Delane Sloan, F&P senior manager, human resources, agreed.

"We were basically able to keep all of our staff and maintained profitability through all that time, which is quite a feat," Harrison said.

The company employs up to 300 temporaries from agencies to help adjust during production fluctuations, said Sloan. The company also hires from the temporary

staff, she said.

Over the years the Troy area has been a "great place" to recruit employees, Sloan said. "Miami County and surrounding counties, the people here have a great work ethic, are hardworking, dedicated, loyal. I think, in general, we had a lot of good success, a lot of great people," she said.

Finding employees has become more difficult the last two to three years as more people retire and there is more competition for available workers.

One of the biggest challenges is finding technical people including robotic technicians and engineers, Harrison said. To help ease that concern, the company has been working with technical colleges and training graduates at the facility, Sloan said.

"They have the base knowledge. We team them up with our more experienced people," she said. "That is working real- »

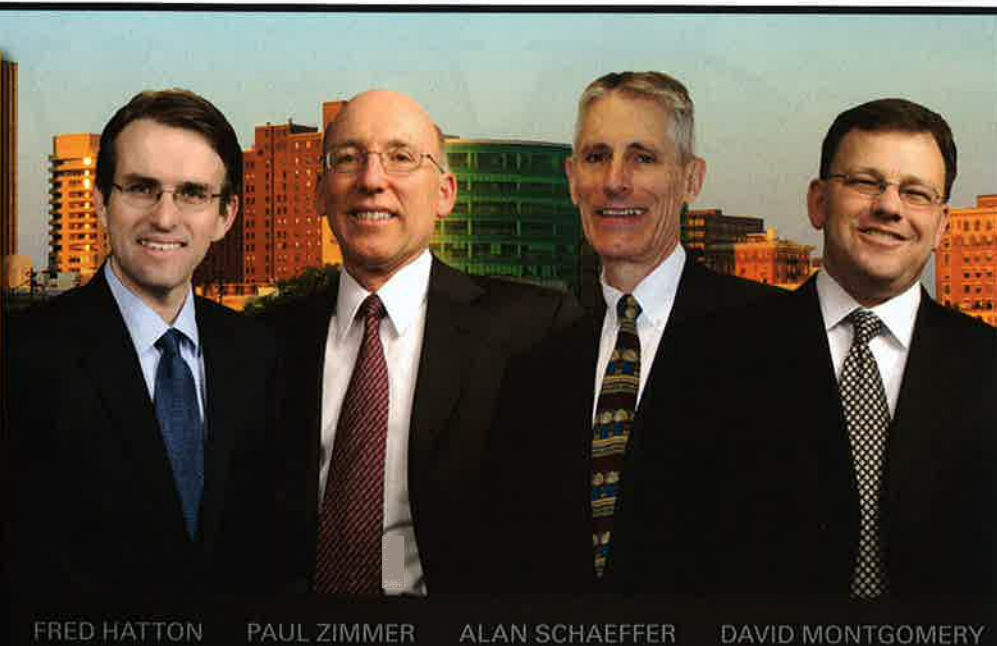


Detail of quality control being done on the production of the Honda CRV pedal assembly at F&P America, a World Class, Tier-One International Automotive Systems Supplier, and now Troy's largest industrial employer. B2B Staff photo by Jim Witmer

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ly well."

The company has numerous employees who have been on board since day one. Sloan, a Troy native, has been with the company 10.5 years. Harrison has been with the company 35 years and in Troy since 2001.

Sloan described the company as "a great place to work" with good benefits and a good working environment. Harrison said he thinks company focus on communications helps immensely. There are regular plant manager meetings and associate meetings.

Business planning and financial informa-

tion are shared with associates as part of a "very transparent" system, Sloan said.

What's ahead

Harrison said the roll out of the new Honda technology was the last big achievement at the facility. Fifty associates, technicians, engineers and managers traveled to Japan for three months of training in the new technology. "As a result, we had no issues with start-up," he said.

When a new contract with GM is fully under way at the Troy facility, the factory basically will be full with stamping, welding and painting running three full shifts, he said. The next North American area of growth will be the Georgia facility where there is some capacity to fill.

"Going forward, our business is very strong, very stable," Harrison said.

Contact this contributing writer at nancykburrr@aol.com.

F&P America Mfg. Inc.

Address: 2101 Corporate Drive, Troy

Products: Automotive suspension systems and pedal assemblies

Employees: 975

Founded in Troy: 1993

Local Leadership: Kenichi Ando, president; David Harrison, managing director; Delane Sloan, senior manager, human resources

Angie Palbas inspects the front engine cradle for defects at F&P America, a World Class, Tier-One International Automotive Systems Supplier, and now Troy's largest industrial employer. B2B Staff photo by Jim Witmer

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