

Delft testing laboratory delivers valuable customer benefits

The recently opened American Glass Research testing laboratory in Delft, The Netherlands provides Europe's glass packaging manufacturers and brand owners with a diverse range of essential services, with the benefit of shorter turnaround times. Bill Slusser, Director of Research at Agr International Inc, discusses the facility's capabilities and experienced management team.

The AGR testing laboratory in Delft, The Netherlands officially opened this February with a ribbon cutting by local Delft Official City Council Member Ferrie Förster. There was also a special opening of Champagne bottles by Agr CEO, Henry Dimmick Jr and Director of Research, Bill Slusser. Sabres were used expertly to cut off the tops of the Champagne bottles, demonstrating a technique they would not normally endorse! However, in light of the festive occasion, they made an exception.

According to Henry Dimmick Jr, the Delft testing laboratory will provide numerous benefits to customers, including shorter turnaround times, which will save money. "In addition, they will enjoy the added convenience of transacting business in the same language, time zone and currency."

Guests, including a number of glass manufacturers and brand owners, toured the facility and attended complementary seminars entitled 'The Do's and Don'ts of Lightweighting' and 'Understanding and Establishing Impact Criteria'.

AGR demonstrated its testing equipment capabilities for fracture diagnosis, performance testing and defect identification, while guests were also provided opportunities for some hands-on experience. Other services

offered by the laboratory include:

- Bottle design.
- Lightweighting.
- Filling line and glass plant audits.
- Proof-of-design testing.
- Dimensional evaluation.
- Analysis of label, decoration and closure issues.
- Evaluation of coating performance.
- Private and open enrollment training seminars.

Experienced team

The laboratory is managed by AGR Senior Scientist Peter de Haan, who is supported by Jennifer Hu-a-ng, Office Manager and lab technicians Laura van der Harg and Samantha Beijersbergen van Henegouwen. This team is supported by AGR commercial representatives, Aleksander Broda and Ewa Prokulewicz.

Following 18 years of experience in the glass manufacturing industry, including four years as the Quality Manager for an international glass container manufacturer, Peter de Haan joined AGR in 2013. He assumed the role of Senior Scientist and according to Bill Slusser, immediately enhanced the level of glass manufacturing knowledge of the staff. "During the period up to 2017, while based in

our USA testing facility, he gained valuable insight into AGR methodology, procedures and experience as he oversaw multiple testing, fracture and glass technology projects."

According to Mr Slusser, management of an AGR facility requires an individual that possesses a balance of technical expertise, training skills, procedure implementation, logistical planning, administration and dedication. "Since this facility started from the ground up, it also required an individual with immense passion for the vision of creating a fully functional laboratory. Peter was uniquely qualified in all these areas. He has been an integral part of the management team during his time in Butler and he strongly believes in the vision we have created for the future of American Glass Research."

Working alongside Peter de Haan is an experienced team of customer service and laboratory specialists. After 18 years of customer service experience with a leading German chemical manufacturer with responsibility for the Dutch office, Jennifer



Delft Official City Council Member Ferrie Förster cuts the ribbon at the laboratory opening ceremony.



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Henry Dimmick Jr (right) and Bill Slusser 'wielded' sabres to remove the tops of Champagne bottles to celebrate the laboratory opening.

Hu-a-ng joined AGR in May 2017 as Office Manager Europe. Besides her office responsibilities, she is the main contact for customer communications with the Delft laboratory.

Laboratory technicians, Laura van der Harg and Samantha Beijersbergen, already possessed extensive experience in the quality assurance aspects of glass packaging prior to joining AGR in 2017. Both had been employed by an international glass container manufacturer as members of the quality group. Immediately after joining, they completed an intensive training programme at AGR's Butler, USA headquarters to become familiar with the standards, methods and quality that customers expect. "For the American Glass Research team, learning is an ongoing endeavour and we ensure that our technical staff remains fully trained through annual recertification on all our test procedures" Bill Slusser explains.

Co-ordinated activities

AGR's testing laboratories in Butler and Delft will essentially act as a single team that is capable of supporting both locations. All project work, seminar scheduling, audit scheduling and consultation service are managed globally. "From an internal point-of-view, we are one team of project leaders, technicians and support staff that will assist our customers in the best and most efficient manner possible" says Director of Research, Bill Slusser.

Plans for expanding the European facility are already in place, its footprint being similar to AGR's Butler facility, where 20 employees are located. "Thus, the number of employees in Delft is expected to expand proportionally, along with project capacity requirements" Mr Slusser confirms. "We are already in the process of hiring a project leader to ensure seamless project completion for those periods that Peter travels for seminar instruction, glass manufacturing audits, on-site consultancy or customer visits."

European growth opportunities

While recognising that the European market represents arguably the greatest density of glass manufacturers and fillers of any region, AGR's analysis indicates that the company's participation, while strong, has not been fully developed. "This was the main factor behind our strategic decision to establish the new European laboratory" says Bill Slusser. "We believe that providing our European and adjacent regional customers quicker response time, at reduced shipping costs while providing answers in the same time zone, currency and languages will be the combination that grows our business. The fact that the name American Glass Research is already recognisable throughout the industry and that the new laboratory is fully supported should make the transition easy for our customers."

Through multiple European seminars dating back 45 years, American Glass Research has enjoyed steady growth in the region, the company's reputation and experience with European customers having been strengthened through multiple interactions during training sessions. "With technology advances, timely communication is now a simple matter and our European customer relationships have grown along with those advances" Mr Slusser explains. "Over the past 10 years, we have enjoyed steady growth in the region by leveraging a portion of Aleksander Brodas' time while he was still a member of the Agr equipment sales team. The addition of the laboratory is the culminating activity providing tangible evidence that we believe in the importance of this region as a growth opportunity."

Bill Slusser is confident that AGR's vision for serving the region is poised for success. "Our long-time customer partnerships with the multi-national groups based in Europe will be strengthened. In addition, our added presence in the market will provide the opportunity to introduce independent fillers and manufacturers to our services and to develop their trust in our ▶

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expertise. As long as there are problems to address in the glass packaging market, American Glass Research will be well positioned to assist.”

Training success

AGR’s Glass Technology Training Seminars have been popular in Europe for many years. In particular, the company has organised open enrollment seminars in Munich, Germany for 45 years. These events are routinely sold out, particularly the ‘Fracture 1: Testing and Breakage Diagnosis of Glass Containers’ and ‘Evaluation and Lightweighting of Glass Container Designs’ seminars. Successful annual open enrollment locations have also been established in Krakow, Poland and Montecchio Emilia, Italy.

In addition, AGR’s bottle design analysis service has always been strong in Europe due to the electronic nature of the service provided. “Sending technical drawings and specifications via email makes computer stress analysis accessible throughout the world” Bill Slusser explains. “However, the services that have historically been more difficult to access for our European customers include fracture analysis, container testing and glass technology due to the time and financial constraints of having to ship actual samples to the USA. The new laboratory eliminates those constraints and therefore, we foresee these services as rivaling those for popularity in the coming years.”

In addition, Agr’s filling line audit service is an area that many brand owners around the world are starting to embrace, as they realise accurate impact data often allows for glass lightweighting opportunities. This can translate into substantial cost savings for customers.

Commercial focus

The European commercial team of Aleksander Broda and Ewa Prokulewicz has a longstanding association with American Glass Research as they have promoted its services in tandem with their primary sales function for Agr



Bill Slusser describes the features of laboratory equipment at the Delft facility.



AGR Senior Scientist Peter de Haan (left) with Glass Worldwide’s Frazer Campbell.

International equipment in the past. With the opening of the Delft laboratory, a strategic decision has been made to capitalise in this area by changing the team’s focus to solely promoting American Glass Research. Between their ongoing organisation of the Krakow, Poland seminars, their strong connection to clients and their familiarity with the benefits of AGR’s services, Mr Broda and Ms Prokulewicz are well positioned to promote the European growth expected.

The territory assigned to the commercial team extends beyond Europe to the Middle East, including North Africa. It also involves a significant portion of Asia, including Russia. “In other parts of the world, we continue to partner with our parent organisation, Agr International and their equipment sales team” Bill Slusser confirms. “The sales team has been fully briefed on American Glass Research services. They understand when customer issues require our assistance and they are quick to place us in direct contact with their customers.”

The European laboratory was promoted extensively at drinktec last year and will be highlighted again at glasstec in Düsseldorf this October. “Because the show takes place in Germany, it is natural that we will emphasise our new, stronger European presence” says Bill Slusser. “However, our goal is to ensure that all our services, regardless of location, are promoted to our customers that meet with us at glasstec.”

A global brand

According to Mr Slusser, strategically, the concept of using AGR’s European laboratory as a blueprint for future expansion elsewhere around the world is an attractive one. “We have long considered (and are very open to the idea of) placing laboratories across the globe where strong market potential

is identified. However, the key to success lies within the experience and knowledge of our people. Therefore, any future expansion will go hand-in-hand with developing individuals within the region of interest with the proper levels of knowledge and training to successfully carry the American Glass Research brand forward in that region.”

Bill Slusser confirms that AGR’s global business has shown healthy growth for more than a decade. “We believe that the purchase of our Analytical Laboratory in Maumee, Ohio, adding a sales presence, increasing our reach through marketing efforts and improving our communication directly with our customers have all greatly contributed to this trend.” He is confident that the European laboratory will provide a significant boost to the company’s short- and medium-term growth. “Finally, we are convinced that success earned from our past expansion experiences will translate to additional growth globally in the long-term.” ●



Bill Slusser addresses guests at the AGR Delft laboratory opening.



Guests included glass manufacturers and brand owners.



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