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Heidtman Ventures into the Tube-Making Business

Tuesday, June 30, 2020 7:29 PM Written by [Tim Triplett](#) Published in [Pipe & Tube](#)

Heidtman Steel, one of the country's leading coil service centers, has expanded into tube manufacturing through a joint venture known as TNT Pipe and Tube. The new tube mill, located at Heidtman's Erie, Mich., flat rolled processing plant, began initial production last month and will be fully operational by the end of August, said Heidtman President and CEO Tim Berra



Heidtman was approached by TNT's President Nick Williams a year ago about partnering to expand the company. It proved to be an ideal way for Heidtman to fill underutilized capacity for galvanizing, pickling, slitting and warehousing, while moving into a value-added product for its coil processing capabilities. "Heidtman will use our 700,000-ton buying power, our technical and operational capabilities and our market reach to support this tube mill," said Berra.

Heidtman, the majority shareholder in the venture, invested \$9.1 million to equip the facility with the latest, fully automated tube making technology. "The efficiencies of the equipment and the quality of the product have really exceeded our expectations," said Berra. Setting the company apart will be its market focus on galvanized tubing and its ability to "remetalize" its products. The process adds zinc to cover the welds, then applies a clear coat, to give each tube optimum corrosion resistance.

The new mill has the ability to produce structural and mechanical tubing products up to 4 square or 5 round at wall thicknesses from 0.35-0.187 inch.

TNT Pipe and Tube's primary customer during the initial production ramp-up is a recreational vehicle component manufacturer in Indiana, but the company anticipates adding business among various HR, HRPO and galvanized tubing applications such as solar systems, greenhouses and fence posts. At full capacity, the tube mill will produce 7,000 tons per month, Berra said.

At a time when so many companies are struggling as the coronavirus takes a toll on the economy, Heidtman and TNT are notable exceptions. "Our timing was perfect. Everyone is buying RVs right now. People aren't vacationing in hotel rooms. They want to control their own environment."

Tim Triplett



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