

“Bridging the Pacific” Growing Oregon Company Bridges Japanese and American Business Worlds

By Jim Hill

The Pacific Northwest enjoys a special relationship with Japan and points throughout Asia. These ties are historic, cultural and economic. Now, Northwest Airlines’ “Bridging the Pacific” service from Portland to Tokyo’s Narita Airport offers a great opportunity to further strengthen our regional economies and encourage more investment, job creation and cultural exchange.

That’s how Doug Smith, co-owner of the Portland-based company InSpec Group, describes the nearly one-year old direct air service between Portland and Tokyo. In many ways, InSpec also serves as a kind of “bridge across the Pacific.”

InSpec provides integrated project management services for its customers, many of whom are setting up overseas operations for the first time or expanding existing facilities. InSpec started as the dream of two men, one Japanese and one American. Now, it has grown into a well-established company with roots in Oregon, but active projects in multiple states, site selection engagements from Montreal to Melbourne and in pursuit of projects from Texas to Virginia.

Entrepreneurs Taro Toyoda and Doug Smith shared a vision to improve the way Japanese businesses open and operate facilities in the United States. From the outset they realized they would have to bridge the many gaps – cultural, business, regulatory, and otherwise – between their countries that sometimes seem as wide as the ocean that separates the nations. Simply stated, their goal was to provide Japanese businesses a service that would handle every aspect of a project from the earliest planning stages to the time product was leaving the door. The result was InSpec.

At 41, Smith’s primary experience is in international project development and strategic management consulting, including site selection, market entry strategy, feasibility analysis and business process reengineering. He serves on the Board of Directors of the Japan-America Society of Oregon and on the Board of Advisors to the Center for Japanese Studies at Portland State University. He has a degree in international studies from Cornell University and worked with the Oregon Economic Development Department as Manager of International Business Development.

Toyoda is 39 years old and has a solid construction and project development background, with particular strength in manufacturing process engineering for the food, chemicals and electronic materials

design and engineering disciplines, including civil, structural, mechanical, electrical, instrumentation and controls. InSpec’s construction team provides on-site supervision of all phases of construction and a strong project management focus on schedule, safety and quality. They strive always to deliver projects to their customers at a minimum of cost and in the most efficient manner to meet tight schedules and budget.

Companies at the early stages of a project benefit from InSpec’s technical engineering and construction expertise which helps customers take constructability into account when making decisions about where to locate their facility. Among InSpec’s current projects is a site selection evaluation for one of the world’s leaders in the electronic materials sector. This project has taken InSpec team members to three continents and involves a comprehensive evaluation of the economic and engineering pros and cons of multiple candidate locations.

A real advantage InSpec brings to each project is they know the operating environment their Japanese customers are accustomed to and make every effort to exceed expectations. They are aware of some cultural differences and pitfalls that some companies have fallen victim to and are able to provide clear advice based on practical experience about how best to successfully launch new ventures.

One company currently benefiting from such start-up advice is HABA, a leading Japan-based cosmetics maker, which operates a factory at Tomakomai, Hokkaido. HABA’s facility, near Portland’s sister city of Sapporo, has received numerous awards in Japan for its natural surroundings and quality design. In keeping with the company’s use of only natural ingredients, InSpec’s design for HABA’s new Portland showroom reflects the clean and pure basis of everything HABA strives for in its business.

It’s clear InSpec views its work as more than just buildings – they are the foundations of growth and business success for their customers. InSpec is serving as



InSpec partners Taro Toyoda & Doug Smith (photo by Jim Hill)

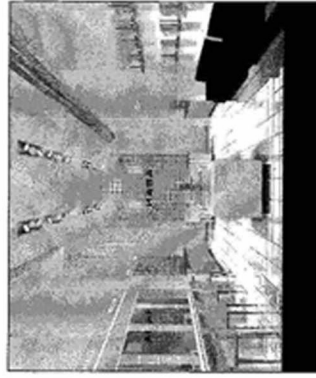
industries. He has extensive knowledge of process control systems and often takes the lead in navigating the complex differences between Japanese and US standards for production equipment. He has more than 15 years of construction experience and worked for a leading national design/build firm involved in large-scale projects in the automotive, electronic materials and food processing sectors.

The Portland-based firm’s primary focus is on helping its customers design, build and operate manufacturing facilities and commercial spaces. Their group comprises a full range of architectural



InSpec manages procurement and installation of manufacturing process equipment, including this food processing line

construction manager for a significant expansion of the Toray Composites (America), Inc., facility outside Seattle, Washington, to serve Boeing’s demand for advanced materials for the new 7E7 passenger aircraft. The plant is a critical link in a global supply chain that will result in the



Conceptual Design for new U.S. Headquarters & Retail Showroom of HABA Labs USA (artist’s rendering by Misato Kulpa for InSpec)

most lightweight, fuel efficient and the structurally sound passenger aircraft in the world.

“Each company we work with has a vision of having a business up and running and we bring that vision to life. We help in all facets and even find time to assist with small things outside of work on behalf of our customer’s employees who may have never worked overseas before. We have, and we



Expansion of Toray Composites (America) facility outside Tacoma, Washington (photo by Mark Sedlakas)

know the challenges they are facing and how best to help them get settled so they can focus on being productive and making their business successful,” says Smith.

In small ways and larger ones, InSpec continues to build bridges across the Pacific.