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Prichett continuing his father's illuminating work at Lumetta

By Claudia Chiappa - 05/26/2023



SEEING THE LIGHT: Ian Prichett, CEO and president of Lumetta Inc., stands on the floor of the Warwick lighting manufacturer with some of its designs hanging overhead.

Lumetta Inc. started in 1992 in a garage in Jamestown. In its early days, founder William Prichett would work on small light fixtures such as wall sconces, traveling periodically to New York City to sell his pieces.

Even then, his 9-year-old son, Ian Prichett, looked at his dad's work with interest.

"I was always curious," he said. "I would see him make sculpture with his hands. We had machinery and tools in that garage. ... He taught me a lot of stuff along the way."

It's been over 30 years since then, and William Prichett's legacy lives on. Not only that, but the garage-born business has bloomed into an operation out of a 37,000-square-foot facility in Warwick, earning a name well known nationwide.

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For Ian Prichett, who lost his father suddenly in 2020, keeping the company alive and thriving is a way to honor his memory.

"He wasn't like a legacy guy, but I'm sure he'd be happy that Lumetta is still going and we're still growing," said Prichett, who now serves as CEO and president.

A lighting manufacturer, Lumetta produces and sells various luminaires across the United States and Canada. Most projects are for high-end residential buildings and commercial buildings, Prichett said, including hospitals, universities, churches, restaurants and hotels.

Some of its work can be found in local landmarks, such as the custom surface-mounted drums at the Cranston Public Library, the shadow drums and box sconces at Brown University's Geological Sciences Department, or the drum pendants at Salve Regina University in Newport.

With a focus on creativity and innovation, Prichett said about 25%-30% of the projects are custom work, in which Lumetta works with clients and architects to create a design that realizes their vision.

"A lot of manufacturers have steered away from doing large-scale custom because it can be risky. My father loved doing custom projects because it allowed us to see what we could do but also develop new products and improve upon current processes in house," Prichett said.

Ryan Heelan, engineering and sales support at Lumetta, is one of the people that follows a project from its inception to the moment it leaves the door.

"With something you've done before, you have that experience and past history to sort of guide you; when it's something you've never done before, you're jumping into the void there and sort of hoping for the best," said Heelan, who has been with Lumetta for more than 10 years.

Heelan is one of the many specialized engineers, designers and artisans that make up Lumetta, a team that fluctuates anywhere between 20 and 45 employees. It's this team of employees that makes everything possible, Prichett said, from the design process to the production, marketing and sale of the product.



CUSTOM DESIGN: Mira DeLaCruz, an assembler at lighting manufacturer Lumetta Inc. in Warwick, works on putting together some of the company's custom commercial luminaires.

"This company is nothing without [the] employees because they make such a beautiful product," Prichett said. "They've been loyal the entire time. Pure craftsmanship is what they do."

It was Lumetta's well-connected network of distributors that helped the company stay afloat during the COVID-19 pandemic. Unlike many other industries, manufacturers remained open throughout 2020 and 2021, but many experienced supply chain issues that threw a wrench in the manufacturing process and delayed production.

It's one of the perks of being a small manufacturer, said Bowen Wheatley, Lumetta's product design lead.

"It allows us to better coordinate everything that we're doing because we're all in it together," Wheatley said. "We've always placed great value on those relationships. We partner with them when we can because we count on them, they count on us."

Lighting is an ever-changing industry, and a competitive one too. This is why staying up to date with trends and industry demands is important.

"It's a continuous process, you're constantly learning every day, constantly spending time on the floor and learning from each department," Prichett said. "Because in the lighting world, things do evolve pretty quickly in terms of technologies and product design and things like that."

One of the most recent trends that Prichett and Heelan have been seeing is the rise in popularity of energy-saving and recycled products. In some cases, it's not just a preference - it's a legal requirement. But whether it's dictated by law or customer preference, Lumetta is producing more environmentally conscious luminaires, such as those equipped with wireless control or made with reused and recycled components.

To stand out in a competitive industry, Lumetta has adopted a few strategies that help make it successful, including relying on lean manufacturing and cross-training. This is focusing on a no-excess mindset, which reduces waste, and on training employees to efficiently travel between departments.

"You can shuffle labor around. It's a really good way to keep everything flowing and to make sure you're maintaining your ship dates," Prichett said. "And lean manufacturing ... it's a steady flow from department to department. It's not buying in excess, having an excess of labor."

The small fixtures that William Prichett used to make in his garage are what Ian Prichett calls legacy fixtures, the luminaires that started Lumetta. They can still be found scattered in the Warwick warehouse, in Prichett's office or in the production area. They are also a testament to how production has changed, from manual wire forming to the use of computer numerical control machines.

Prichett has stayed up to date with technology, investing in expensive machinery to streamline production, including a \$200,000 laser machine. But he is not giving up on the legacy fixtures either, which he said lately have been coming back in popularity.

"I just refuse to take them out of the product line for sentimentality," Prichett said. "What we've seen with design and fashion is when something loses its appeal, it kind of always comes back. So, we've started to see more and more of this stuff coming back into style."

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