

Symetrics expands with purchase of new facility at Nasa Palms Center

By Ken Datzman

Symetrics Industries Inc. continues to grow and add employees to its ranks in the face of a tumultuous business environment that for the past 24 months has forced many companies into a defensive, cost-cutting mode.

The private Melbourne business, led by President and Chief Executive Officer Mitchell Garner, a University of Central Florida chemistry graduate, has grown its work force from around 150 employees last year to 170 in 2010.

Technology businesses across the nation seem to be leading the recovery, as many of them are hiring people again to keep up with new demand.

First-quarter bookings this year at Symetrics — a company that specializes in the design, manufacture, and testing of electronic systems for the U.S. Department of Defense, NASA, and prime contractors — have surged.

The company's business is concentrated in three core segments: data links, aircraft self-protection systems, and electronic-

manufacturing services.

"We've had an incredible three months of booking business, which is something that I am very focused on," said Garner, whose company is expanding to a location near its 42,000-square-foot corporate headquarters on West Nasa Boulevard.

"In just the first three months, we're nearly half way to our bookings' goal for the year. We've had a great year so far, and we're hoping to keep the momentum going."

The uplifting news is on top of a U.S. Army contract Symetrics won in fall of 2009, which has the potential to mature into a \$50 million deal. Presently, the current contract is worth roughly \$20 million in business.

"It was a huge win for us," he said, adding that the award has increased the company's need for space for Symetrics' growing team of engineers.

Garner did not have to look far for expansion space for his company which was a public entity more than a decade ago before going private.

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BBN photo — Adrienne B. Roth

Mitchell Garner, right, president and CEO of Symetrics Industries Inc., a high-tech business in Melbourne, is expanding from its corporate campus to nearby Nasa Palms Professional Center, an office-condominium park developed by John Newton. Symetrics purchased a 6,000-square-foot building at Nasa Palms that will house 15 to 20 engineers. When fully developed, Nasa Palms will feature seven buildings totaling 42,000 square feet, said Newton, president of Newton Commercial Group.

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Symetrics Industries

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Commercial real estate developer John Newton's new Nasa Palms Professional Center is just a short walk next door from Symetrics' corporate location.

When fully developed, Nasa Palms will feature seven buildings totaling 42,000 square feet. Five of the buildings, situated on a five-acre campus, have been completed and house a number of private medical practices.

Nasa Palms is where Garner's company purchased a new 6,000-square-foot existing building "shell," extending its corporate footprint from 1615 W. Nasa Blvd.

The interior of the Nasa Palms facility is being fitted to meet Symetrics' specific needs. The new site will house 15 to 20 engineers, Garner said.

This transaction is an example of how a well-managed small business is giving a lift to the local commercial real-estate market during one of the most challenging times for brokers.

Commercial real estate is the basis for much of the growth in American industry and the economy. But high unemployment rates and tight credit conditions have hampered the market's performance over the past year. As a result, it has sharply sliced into sales transactions for commercial real-estate professionals.

"We are very glad to have Symetrics expand into Nasa Palms," said Newton, president of Newton Commercial Group, a full-service real-estate firm in Melbourne. "Their presence enhances our park and the transaction creates another full building. Nasa Palms has catered mostly to medical practices, but we are a high-tech, flexible, professional office complex."

He added, "By having an existing building in the park where the interior is ready to be customized saves Mitch and his team a lot of time, as opposed to constructing a building from scratch somewhere. And that is important in business because they can turn on the activity in the building much quicker and start taking advantage of the work they have been contracted to do."

Garner said Symetrics had started to work on a plan to

address the space constraints at the company's flagship building, created by its growing work force. Of the building's 42,000 square feet, about 25,000 is dedicated to manufacturing.

"The timing is almost perfect because we were considering remodeling some of the areas of our existing building," said Garner, whose company was named Manufacturer of the Year in 2008 by the Manufacturers Association of Florida.

"Nasa Palms is something we've always had in the back of our minds, that perhaps down the road once these shells went up we could buy one of them. And we were fortunate to have gotten the closest one to our main building. So it worked out really well," he said.

Newton said his company completed the office-condominium shell (that Symetrics later purchased) in the hopes of "finding a business to occupy the entire building or half of it, and it was great timing for Symetrics."

The Nasa Palms site affords building owners and tenants individual parking spaces in front of their single-level units, versus a common-area parking lot that is distant from their offices.

The architecture of the condominiums at Nasa Palms emphasizes design and visual appeal. The office park showcases a "South Beach deco" look, with pastels colors and coconut palm trees throughout the campus. "It's something we did to help make the park stand out a little more in the market," Newton said.

Newton said his business has managed to keep its "pricing structure very low and its construction costs in check. We haven't had to drive our prices up over the past two years, and that has allowed us to be very competitive in the marketplace."

Newton Commercial Group is also marketing a 4,200-square-foot space at Nasa Palms that "could be subdivided into smaller units" and finished to a customer's needs.

The local project team for Symetrics' new building includes architect Dave Nagrodsky of DNA Architects Inc.,

American Business Interiors, and M.E. Construction Inc. "It's a great team effort and so far everything is right on schedule," Garner said.

This is Symetrics' first expansion since becoming a private firm in 1998.

Symetrics' Nasa Palms building will contain an engineering laboratory, he said. Flexible office spaces around the perimeter of the facility will give Symetrics the ability to reconfigure "the space if we need to add one or two more people in the future."

The building will have a conference room and a director's office. "We are currently working with Rob Perers and his team at ABI on designing the interior space of the new building," Garner said. Perers is president and chief executive officer of the longtime family business.

Symetrics is also expanding at its main location. The company is renovating about 2,000 square feet of space on its mezzanine, upstairs. The space is being converted into a training facility.

Garner said his company has received a host of contracts for training customers on the use of Symetrics' products and technology, such as its data links. The Boeing Co., for example, recently awarded a \$1 million contract to Symetrics to "provide training on a certain type of technology" the Melbourne company manufactures.

That effort starts in July and the training runs for a solid three months, Garner said. "Rather than tie up one of our existing conference rooms, we decided to go ahead and renovate our mezzanine and put in a classroom-type training facility that will house about 20 people."

Outside the campus, Symetrics' executive team and employees stay connected to the community through volunteerism.

Garner and colleague Randy Koller, who is the business-development manager at Symetrics, served as the "revenue chairs" for the recent 2010 March of Dimes' March for Babies event, the nonprofit organization's signature fund-raiser of the year.