

**Article from "The Manufacturer" September 2006**

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**GLOBE MANUFACTURING CONTINUES TO GROW AND PROSPER LARGELY BECAUSE THE FOUR-GENERATION FAMILY-OWNED BUSINESS FOCUSES ON JUST ONE THING: PERFECTING THE MOST PROTECTIVE, LONGEST-LASTING FIREFIGHTER TURNOUT GEAR IN THE WORLD**

Globe Manufacturing Company had its beginnings in Lynn, MA, in 1887 when J.D. Cleaver set up shop as a harness maker. In 1901 his brother-in-law, Courtland F.H. Freese, bought the business and moved it to its present home in the small rural town of Pittsfield, NH.

Freese was a farsighted man who could see the handwriting on the wall. He realized that times were changing. People were moving off the farm, and automobiles were taking the place of the horse and buggy. Deciding that there were new opportunities, he continued to manufacture harnesses downstairs while making firefighter's suits upstairs. He obtained a patent for a waterproof construction method for firefighter suits that is still in use in the fire service today.

Rob Freese is Courtland's great-grandson and Globe Manufacturing's senior vice president of sales and marketing. He says that the company, which is still based in Pittsfield, where it occupies a 78,000-square-foot facility and has a workforce of 350, is still owned and managed by the Freese family.

Two years ago the company took another bold step when it bought a former Wrangler Jeans plant in Ada, OK. Globe now employs about 50 people in that facility, which is about half the size of the Pittsfield plant. "We bought that plant because we needed additional capacity and Americans at work," Freese says.

Globe's customer base includes fire departments in all 50 states and 78 countries. "We're doing north of \$60 million a year, and according to DuPont, we're the largest producer of firefighter turnout gear on the planet," he says.

Globe lists an impressive number of firsts. It was the first manufacturer of firefighter suits in the world, the first to use DuPont Nomex inherently flame-resistant materials, the first to use 3M Scotchlite reflective materials, and the first to use expanded PTFE moisture barriers, including Gore-Tex and Cross Tech, in structural firesuits. It's also the first manufacturer to make exclusively to the NFPA 1971 standard, having participated in the creation of this industry standard, and the first manufacturer to be ISO 9001 registered. Other certifications include Lloyd's of London, Canadian General Standards Board, and National Fire Protection Standards.

Globe, says Freese, has no intention of moving offshore. He points to what he describes as a terrific relationship with the suppliers who provide the company with its domestically produced high-strength fibers and flame-resistant materials.

Globe has already seen dramatic results from the implementation of lean five years ago. Freese adds, however, that introducing the lean philosophy into the Pittsfield plant was a bit impeded at first by about 100 years of history, with many long-term employees resistant to change. He admits that it was easier to introduce lean at the company's new Oklahoma facility.

Globe began its lean journey by borrowing six sigma people from the 3M plant in Minnesota and by using Toyota's continuous improvement program. "Toyota actually helped us design the manufacturing process, and we were able to leapfrog all the baby steps in Ada that we couldn't do in Pittsfield, where we had to introduce the lean concept in small increments," he says.

Freese describes Globe's business as much more akin to automobile manufacturing than it is to the garment industry. "That's because we're segmented and highly customized. We have literally 1.5 million options and combinations of ways to build our clothing, and our operation had become a little unwieldy, so lean really has made a big difference," he continues.

"Ours is a custom product. We're always in touch with our customers and always listen to their needs. Our average order size is for four garments. Before lean, it was taking 28 days from the time an order would hit our sewing room until it was ready for shipment. Since lean we're down to 4.5 days from start to finish. So you can see that lean is an amazing process for us," he says.

Continuing a tradition set by Freese's great-grandfather, Globe continues to adapt to changing needs. "For the first six decades of the 20th century there was very little change in firefighting technology, and, though they managed to change to a more mechanized version of the same thing, fires were still fought with bucket brigades and by pouring water on them,"

Freese explains, adding that firefighting tactics changed in the late 1960s with the advent of the self-contained breathing apparatus.

“Prior to that point, as a company, we essentially made fancy raingear—clothing to keep firefighters warm and dry in places like New England. But gear now is designed to provide a level of resistance to flame and to the high temperatures involved in today’s buildings, which are now constructed not only with wood but with metal and a lot of fibers made of petrochemicals. Consequently, today’s fire gear has to withstand higher temperatures,” he says.

With 9/11, the industry changed dramatically. “We used to think of ourselves as being in the fire service industry, but now we’re in a first-responder industry. Firefighters today do more than fight fires; they respond to so much other stuff—vehicle accidents, all sorts of rescues. When there’s trouble, it’s the fire department that’s called. Consequently, our products have had to maintain lockstep with where our customers need to go. Our products today are more comfortable, more protective, lighter weight, and offer protection in various environments and against things like blood-borne pathogens and common chemicals,” he says. “Firefighters have to operate in a broad spectrum of environments today because their jobs have changed, and we have to change with them.”

The lessons learned from their Freese forbears, “stay focused on a business plan, keep your wits about you, drive forward, and be positive,” are invaluable, says Freese.

He adds that Globe Manufacturing has a great story to tell. “It’s a unique story of industrial America, where a family-owned business can still be successful. We’re a fourth-generation family-owned business with only about one percent of fourth-generation family-owned businesses in the country today,” he says. “That ownership allows us to take a much larger view of our marketplace. It lets us put things into motion and pull triggers on products that meet our customers’ needs as they need them.”