Solvay Marietta Site Celebrates 50th Anniversary of Udel Polymer Used in Space Flights, Medical, Industrial and Consumer Applications

MARIETTA, OHIO--(Sept. 27, 2015)--The expression “Everything old is new again” often applies to fashion, antiques and even recycled toys, tools and technology. For Solvay Specialty Polymers’ iconic Udel® brand of polysulfone polymer, a 50-year-old technology is still as new as automotive electronics, medical devices and filtration membranes that function at the molecular level.

More than 200 Solvay employees, retirees, family members and friends today celebrated the 50th anniversary of Udel® production with picnic and family festivities at Solvay’s Marietta site on Route 7 where Udel® was first produced in 1965. Since then, the versatile transparent plastic has grown from a niche product with unique heat-resistant properties, to a nearly ubiquitous material suited to applications needing, lightweight strength and durability at high temperatures, corrosion resistance or the ability to withstand prolonged exposure to hot, chlorinated water.

In 1969, Udel® was used in the gold film covering the visor of Apollo 11 space suits of astronauts who were the first humans to land on the moon. Today, Udel® is used in medical and dental devices and instruments as well as highly sophisticated membranes used in hemodialysis. Udel® has a long history in healthcare because it maintains its transparency and performance capabilities at high temperatures, making it suitable for steam sterilization. And Udel® can be found in water treatment filtration membranes and in everyday products such household plumbing and appliances.

The growth of Udel® applications has spurred the growth of the Marietta plant and helped to secure its competitive advantages. Tens of millions of dollars have been invested since 1965 as the plant’s Udel® production capacity more than quadrupled to meet customer demand.

“It’s really unusual and remarkable that a technology product can boast of such a long and innovative history and still have such growth potential in new and evolving applications,” explained Wally Kandel, Solvay’s Marietta site manager. “At Solvay’s Marietta site and throughout the Specialty Polymers organization, we listen to our customers and help them find the best material solution to meet their needs. Our scientists and engineers continue to develop new formulations and processing technologies that help customers meet exacting requirements.”

Kandel added, “We’ve invested substantially in research, equipment upgrades, quality control and training. Today we’re taking the opportunity not only to honor that history but to challenge ourselves for another 50 successful years.”

Kandel also credits the plant’s workforce for safe, reliable and efficient operations. More than 25 percent of the Udel production unit employees have 25 or more years of service. ”Many of our
employees have spent much of their working lives at this plant. Their experience, know-how, teamwork and safety vigilance are valuable assets.”

One of the plant’s longest-serving employees is Gregory Cigal, a senior engineer who joined a Solvay predecessor company in 1981 and has worked on the Udel product for most of his career in Marietta. “I started during one of the early growth periods for Udel,” Cigal explained. “And a few years later, the company acquired a facility in Augusta, Georgia, which provided precursor materials for our operations in Marietta.” That “sister plant” in Augusta helped support Marietta’s growth and is also expanding. “Some of our larger production vessels in Marietta are much the same,” he noted, “but we’ve improved the instrumentation and formulation capability” to produce particular features for certain applications, Cigal recalled. “For example, in the ‘90’s we became a key polymer supplier for computer printer cartridges.”

Beyond products and processes, Cigal has also observed Solvay’s workplace culture. “Solvay has always been at the forefront in dealing with people,” he said, “and engaging people to take ownership of what we’re doing on the job. It’s more than just punching a clock; Solvay recognizes the importance of people.”

Solvay’s Marietta plant, at 17005 State Route 7, produces a wide variety of high-performance plastics and polymeric fluids used in automotive, aircraft, medical devices and other specialized applications. The site employs more than 250 full-time Solvay employees and varying numbers of contract workers, depending on construction schedules.

Solvay Specialty Polymers manufactures over 1500 products across 35 brands of high-performance polymers – fluoropolymers, fluoroelastomers, fluorinated fluids, semi-aromatic polyamides, sulfone polymers, aromatic ultra polymers, high-barrier polymers and cross-linked high-performance compounds – for use in aerospace, alternative energy, automotive, healthcare, membranes, oil and gas, packaging, plumbing, semiconductors, wire and cable, and other industries. Learn more at www.solvay.com.

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