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Big move for GemThane

By Sandy Lockhart

In just three short years, demand for Muskoka-made GemThane siding has grown enough to require a larger production facility.

GemThane Siding Systems, started in December 2006, offers real wood siding and deck and dock material finished with a marine grade polymer called Cottage Coat.

Because of growing sales, GemThane Systems has moved to a larger location, increasing the production capacity by 500 per cent. The new 77,000 sq. ft. space is the former painting factory for Algonquin Automotive in Bracebridge on Ecclestone Drive. GemThane's previous location was only 9,000 sq. ft.

Prompting the move was a dramatic increase in sales, which grew by 46 per cent from 2008 to 2009, according to CEO Ross Mitchell.

"We are projecting an increase of 50 per cent this year," he says.

With the introduction of 25-year warrantied deck and dock material last year, Mitchell believes demand will grow quickly.

"Decks and docks are going to be even bigger than siding," he says. "The decking market of North America is \$5.2 billion and the wood siding market is only \$1 billion."

Mitchell plans to double GemThane's production capacity in 2010.

"By 2011, we could possibly employ 10 in the slow season and 18 to 20 people in the busy season," he says.

GemThane to double production



BIG MOVE: Ross Mitchell, CEO of GemThane Siding Systems, has recently moved the siding facility into the 77,000 sq. ft. space that was the former painting factory for Algonquin Automotive.

GemThane siding is made of carefully kiln dried furniture-grade wood. Then Cottage Coat, GemThane's special marine grade polymer, is sprayed on, encapsulating the wood. Four coats are hand sprayed onto each piece.

"The polymer is a semi-permeable membrane," says Mitchell. "Water can't get through the paint but water vapour can get out. It never gets wet enough to start to support mould and mildew."

The coating on the wood is not a new product.

"It is a slight modification of a coating that has been used industrially since 1983," says Mitchell who is

also the president and general manger of Madison Chemical Industries Inc.

When it was time to paint his own cottage siding in 1998, Mitchell wasn't happy with any of the options so decided to try his own industrial finish and was very pleased with the results.

In 2005, when he needed siding for a new cottage, he bought unfinished siding and used that same industrial finish, which was the beginning of the GemThane Cottage Coat.

"The very first project with GemThane siding was my own cottage. Last summer, for the first time, I did some touch up and it took

about 20 minutes. There was zero fading and you can't tell the north side from the south."

Ten per cent ceramic content has been added to the mixture since then and Mitchell says it dramatically increases the impact resistance, abrasion resistance and hardness. He says that is very important for the deck and dock materials, which need to be hard yet resistant.

"The warmth, charm, beauty and value enhancing properties of wood can be hassle free," he says.