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Sisters Gigi Toporek (right) and Renatta Bolen represent the next generation of the Rokitnicki family to lead Bindery 1.

Born into The Fold

Bindery 1 has added new capabilities, and family members to manage them, to offer clients a wide range of binding/finishing options, mailing, fulfillment and CD duplication services—all from one Midwest location.



Finishing's First Family

THE HISTORY behind full-service finishing provider Bindery 1 Inc., of Des Moines, IA, is a tale based on the American Dream. Seeking a land of opportunity, Eric and Lorraine Rokitnicki immigrated from Poland to the United States in 1963. Eric found work at a commercial printer within its folding department, while his wife gained employment as a registered nurse.

Eric had a natural knack for folding, and enjoyed the challenges of pushing a machine to its limits with projects that were thought to be impossible to complete. He made the most of his talents and, in 1976, started Bindery 1 with two employees, a folder and a cutter.

Shortly thereafter, Rokitnicki realized that a new facility was necessary. So he purchased a 13,000-square-foot building and ventured into other areas of postpress services solely for the trade. The company continued to diversify by adding additional equipment and employees to maximize capacity and offer more finishing services.

Daughter Gigi Toporek, company

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president for the past decade, was exposed to the business at an early age, helping out around the office and in the production department. In 1988, Gigi became involved full-time with the family business, learning all aspects of the industry.

With this experience, she was able to understand how to handle paper, the capabilities of the equipment and what factors make a quality finished piece, Toporek recalls.

“With the knowledge gained from the production floor, I was able to advance into other parts of the business,” she notes. “Throughout the years, I’ve been able to anticipate customers’ needs and act upon them by taking whatever means necessary.”

In 1993, Bindery 1 entered the mailing services market, starting with two labelers and three inserters. In the late 1990s the mailing side expanded into laser personalization with black and highlight color capabilities.

Bindery 1 executives include (standing, from left): Renatta Bolen, Jason Bolen, John Toporek, and Gigi Toporek. Seated are company founders Eric and Lorraine Rokitnicki. The company has been in business since 1976 and boasts a staff of more than 75 employees.

Throughout the years, the company added more capabilities, including custom fulfillment, ink-jet, polybagging and CD-ROM services.

Eric Rokitnicki knew that the mailing division had enormous potential, and entrusted his youngest daughter, Renatta, to oversee its day-to-day operations after she completed her studies at Drake University in 2001.

Renatta notes that she learned the value of hard work and what it takes to succeed by watching her fellow family members. The mailing division, known as Data Solutions, is managed by Renatta along with her husband, Jason Bolen.

“We recognized that our Iowa location was a strategic advantage from a mailing standpoint,” Renatta points out. “Our proximity to the Des Moines BMC (Bulk Mail Center) and all major



A Wohlenberg Champion e perfect binder is the newest addition to the equipment list at Bindery 1 in Des Moines, IA.

Midwest cities makes us attractive to customers on both coasts. Our location and range of equipment means we can often hit an earlier in-home date—a critical requirement for many direct marketers—than other providers.”

As both Data Solutions and Bindery 1 grew, the need for more production space became a primary concern for the two companies.

“By this time, we were operating from three production facilities and all three were quite cramped for space,” Gigi recalls. “We realized a new plant was required for efficiency and growth potential.”

Major Move

So, in 2005, a 150,000-square-foot facility was purchased, which enabled Bindery 1 to combine all of its operations under one roof. Today it is a multi-shift operation with more than 75 employees. The company can offer printers a bevy of finishing options, including perfect binding; stitching and trimming; diecutting; folding; cutting; calendar tinning; small- and large-format laminating; fulfillment; CD duplication; laser personalization; and mailing services such as ink-jetting, inserting, tip-ons, bound printed matter, periodicals, parcels, standard/first class and letters.

Continuing with the family theme, Gigi’s husband, John Toporek, oversees the production in the bindery/finishing department. He is constantly evaluating the state-of-the-art equipment available in the marketplace that could help

Bindery 1 increase operating efficiencies and offer more services to its customers.

“We really mean it when we say everyone here at Bindery 1 is customer-focused,” Gigi stresses. “On-time deliveries, consistent quality and planning expertise are just a few components of a great customer experience. Every Bindery 1 employee knows that we owe our growth and rock-solid stability to our clients.”

The company’s principal belief is that, next to its clientele, information is its most valuable asset. Information gathering is job number one for every individual employed at Bindery 1.

“We are a complete printer’s resource for all bindery, finishing and mailing services,” Gigi promises. “We like to be involved in the initial planning of the proj-

ect to ensure it is printed and produced in the most efficient and cost-effective way possible.”

Keeping customers first is a mantra with merit for this finishing firm. Bindery 1 thrived for more than 30 years without a sales staff—recently hiring its first salesperson. Prior to tapping the additional employee, the company had relied on word of mouth and its Website to generate work.

The family of finishing experts at Bindery 1 thinks of its marketplace in three ways:

- It is always pushing its geographic boundaries outward, now boasting regular customers as far as 500 miles away.

- The company tries to serve all clients equally, no matter where they fall on the large/small continuum. Bindery 1 has the ability to serve the needs of a 1,000-person facility just as well as a small printer with five employees. All customers are deemed important, regardless of their size.

- Bindery 1 excels at both simple and complicated jobs—even the “grind-it-out” type of work some trade binderies might not want to do.

In the past few years, the company execs began to see a need for high-quality perfect binding, which led to the installation last month of a new Wohlenberg Champion e perfect binder, purchased through Colter & Peterson. The new machine is equipped with computerized/motorized setup, as well as an optical signature recognition system to ensure quality control.

An MBO B 30 Perfection folder with Palamides autobander is one of a dozen folding machines in service.



Added Flexibility

It can handle a wide variety of book formats, including soft cover specialty binding, and features a specialty face knife unit (VSS trimmer) allowing for a single pass gate-fold process providing the ability to recess the book face prior to cover placement.

"No one in the Midwest was able to accommodate all of the needs of customers for perfect binding," John Toporek assesses. "Our new Wohlenberg machine will produce standard hot melt, PUR bind, lay-flat binding, Swiss brochures and Euro brochures. We even put a specialty second trimmer on for gate covers, where you can have your face undersized from the foldout—not to mention that we

plate folder with Palamides auto-bander was added to its existing lineup of 11 folders, allowing the company to fold jobs ranging from pharmaceutical to large-format work. This installation has increased the company's throughput, provided a smoother workflow, and cut down on repetitive motions for operators.

■ A Canon IR 125VP black-and-white laser printer for personalization and to increase its sheet size up to 14 $\frac{1}{8}$ "x18 $\frac{1}{2}$ ".

■ Two Bell & Howell Mailstar 400 inserters and two Mailstar 500 inserters, adding to the seven existing inserters.

■ A Scott 10000 index tabber.

■ Additional diecutters and foil stampers.

■ A fully equipped machine shop with mills, lathe, grinders and welders.

"We are always looking for equipment that will help our company grow," Toporek continues. "Being a family business, we are able to make purchasing decisions quickly. We listen to the needs of our customers and do our homework. We continue to add more advanced and automated technology as it becomes available."

The newer equipment additions join an already impressive lineup, which includes, among others, a Brandtjen & Kluge foil stamper and embosser; five diecutters from Heidelberg and Johannesburg; Heidelberg Pacesetter 705 and 562 saddlestitchers; a complete mechanical department for spiral and wire binding; two 45" Polar cutters with joggers; and a dozen folders, including 11 Stahl machines and one H&H unit.

Postal Production

As for Data Solutions, its mailing division, Bindery 1 is exploring variable data software for more complex

jobs, as well as online ordering, and adding capacity to its seven ink-jetting machines.

But where Gigi Toporek feels Bindery 1 really stands out from the rest of the trade finisher crowd is by offering personalized and immediate services both on the customer service end—where a live person always answers the phone—and in the manufacturing area.

"When a promise is made, a promise is kept," the company president confirms. "Our staff knows that a company does not grow by using the word 'no'—we must always keep an open mind on all projects and be ready to act at any given moment."

She also maintains that Bindery 1 holds the important strategic advantage of combining binding, finishing and mailing expertise under one roof.

"Mailing is a different business; one that requires a significantly different skill set," Gigi contends. "But when you get it right, it provides a major competitive advantage in the marketplace."

Renatta Bolen notes that all mail produced by Data Solutions is verified by an in-plant postal representative based on the company's increasing volume.

"An onsite postal inspector is a must for turning around high-volume drops within the schedules our customers demand," she says.

But don't think this finishing family is ready to rest on its laurels just yet. Gigi plans to continue to listen to the needs of Bindery 1's customers, install more fully automated and productive machines and, in turn, pass along the resultant savings to clients.

"We're on a path of continued growth," she concludes. "Bindery 1 is willing to make wise investments in our future success, even while many others are pulling back. This has made—and will continue to make—a positive difference for us over the long run."

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Catering to customer needs is the main focus for all employees at Bindery 1.

will do books as thin as $\frac{1}{16}$ " to $2\frac{7}{16}$ " and books as big as tabloids. As with any piece of equipment we buy, we looked at the diversity that we can bring to the market."

Company execs add that the Wohlenberg is a proven machine, and the fact that there is a major service center right in Des Moines was too good of an opportunity to pass up.

Bindery 1 has also made substantial progress over the past year by adding a variety of other new gear, including:

■ A 30" MBO B 30 Perfection 6-6-4