

NEW CERTIFICATION COULD BRING BIG BOOST TO MICRO LABORATORIES

By: **DAVID PRIZINSKY**

Micro Laboratories Inc. in Mentor has positioned itself to capitalize on the increasingly stringent product quality requirements that original equipment makers are imposing on their suppliers.

A key to the strategy of the seven-employee company was its certification last month as meeting the operating standards of the American Association for Laboratory Accreditation in Frederick, Md. Micro Laboratories measures and verifies the dimensions of gage blocks, which manufacturers use to measure the size of their products to guarantee they meet national standards for accuracy.

The company is one of 30 nationwide to win certification under the association's ISO Guide 25 program, a quality system that applies to testing labs, said Micro Laboratories founder Keith Kokal. Micro Laboratories' procedures were audited by the association, and the company's lab in Mentor was tested for proper humidity and temperature control systems as part of the qualification process.

A spokeswoman for the American Association for Laboratory Accreditation said three calibration laboratories in Ohio have received certification. She said Micro Laboratories is the only one based in the Cleveland area.

Mr. Kokal said the accreditation will help the company's top line.

Our sales have been growing every year, and we expect sales to increase by 20% this year," said Mr. Kokal, who expects the new accreditation to contribute significantly to sales gains. However, Mr. Kokal declined to disclose specific sales figures.

Mr. Kokal said achieving accreditation is critical because manufacturers that supply the auto industry and have QS 9000 systems in place must have their gage blocks checked by accredited labs. QS 9000 is a quality control system imposed on suppliers by the Big Three automakers. Gage blocks are machined from alloy steel and must be checked periodically by companies such as Micro Laboratories.

Mr. Kokal started Micro Laboratories in 1988. He said he worked as a machine operator and quality control manager at several Cleveland-area manufacturing companies before starting the company.

Micro Laboratories now serves about 1,000 customers, most of which are in the Cleveland area, Mr. Kokal said. He said the customer list includes small manufacturers, metalworking job shops and tool and die makers.

"Not many manufacturers calibrate their own gage blocks," Mr. Kokal said. "They outsource the work to laboratories."

Mr. Kokal said outsourcing the work enables manufacturers to avoid investing in the equipment needed to do the calibrations.

One customer is First Machine & Tool Inc. in Willoughby. Herman Lackner, the owner of First Machine, said he would need to turn down business were it not for Micro Laboratories and its ability to perform certified inspections.

"Having Micro Laboratories nearby allows us to do more sophisticated jobs," said Mr. Lackner, whose 10-employee company makes gages that are used by manufacturers to measure the size of automotive parts.

"We do very high quality work, and Micro Laboratories helps us prove it by certifying the quality of our products," Mr. Lackner said.