



Kuriyama of America, Inc., present location at 360 E. State Parkway in Schaumburg, Illinois, USA.

The Evolution of Kuriyama:

An inside look at how Kuriyama of America, Inc. went from reseller to manufacturer and industry leader

For 50 years, Kuriyama of America, Inc. has been serving customers with hoses and fittings for industrial process industries including oil and gas, pneumatic transfer, food and beverage, chemical processing, pharmaceutical, agricultural, wastewater and more. Hose + Coupling World had the pleasure of speaking to Gary Kammes, Corporate Manager - Public Communications, Brian Dutton, Vice President and General Manager, and Les Kraska, President, about the history of the company, how it has adapted to changes in the industry and how it plans to tackle the next half-century.

By Jody Hewitt, Editor

Celebrating its 50th anniversary this year, Kuriyama of America, Inc., a subsidiary of the Kuriyama Holdings Corporation, is a manufacturer and wholesale distributor of industrial rubber and plastic component parts, specializing in rubber and plastic hoses and hose fittings.

Today, the Kuriyama of America, Inc. group of companies includes eight subsidiaries and six distribution centers, providing a complete line of thermoplastic, rubber and metal hose products and accessories for use in industrial and commercial applications.

It wasn't always this way. When it first opened its doors back in 1965, Kuriyama started out as a representative of-



Kuriyama of America, Inc. building in Elk Grove Village, Illinois, in 1981.

fi ce; a reseller of goods imported from its Japanese parent company, Kuriyama Rubber Co., Ltd.

Since then, through collaboration and acquisitions, it has grown into a global supplier with one of the most diverse product catalogs in the industry.

"Because our product line has grown so much through the years, Kuriyama products appeal to a very broad distributor base that touches many market areas," adds Kammes.

Humble beginnings

While the representative office was first opened in New York in 1965, it was not until 1968 that Kuriyama of America, Inc. would be incorporated in Chicago, Illinois at 777 Milwaukee Ave., as a wholly-owned subsidiary of Kuriyama Rubber Co., Ltd. It is this year that Kuriyama considers to be "the birth" of the company in North America.

In 1978, Tigerflex Corporation was established as a joint venture with Kuriyama utilizing the "Tigerflex" brand name.

"That jointly owned factory was our first transition away from simply being a broker or reseller," explains Brian Dutton, Vice President and General Manager. "That's when we



Tigerflex food and beverage hoses.

introduced the Tigerflex brand to the U.S. and signaled our serious desire to invest and grow in North America.”

From there, its entry into manufacturing was very organic. In 1984, Kuriyama Canada, Inc. was established in Brantford, Ontario, Canada, as a manufacturer of yarn and wire reinforced thermoplastic hose and tubing products.

“The establishment of Kuriyama Canada, Inc. in 1984 was a significant development for us at the time,” says Kammes. “It was our first wholly owned manufacturing plant for thermoplastic hose and tubing products in North America.”

In the evolution of the company, as well as from a manufacturing perspective, the Brantford facility represents a significant milestone for the company and the industry as a whole. At the time, according to Kammes, PVC hose manufacturing was very different.

As far as Kammes is aware, Kuriyama was the first to manufacture a yarn reinforced PVC hose product in one pass, starting out as raw pellets at the beginning of the line and resulting in a finished hose product at the other end of the line. “It definitely improved manufacturing efficiencies as well as helped to improve quality standards. That was a major thing in the marketplace at the time,” says Kammes.

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Acquisitions, growth and new markets

In 1989, Kuriyama acquired Accuflex Industrial Hose Ltd., a manufacturer of thermoplastic hose and tubing products in Guelph, Ontario, Canada. Kuriyama took full advantage of Accuflex’s trusted name in thermoplastic hose and tubing products, serving customers across several diverse markets.

In doing so, Kuriyama gained the ability to participate in the worldwide beverage market as well as the propane and

plumbing hose product markets. At the time they were one of the few thermoplastic hose manufacturers operating in North America.

In the late 80s-early 90s, rubber hose was still the standard in many applications: they could withstand high temperatures and were relatively durable and flexible. Then, PVC suction hoses came onto the scene as a lighter-weight, less expensive alternative. “Rubber hose was still king at that time,” explains Kammes. “PVC hoses in general had not been around that long. When I first started in field sales in 1984, if you were a distributor and wanted a PVC product, the product had to be imported from Europe or Asia. There were very few ready-made products available in the United States.”

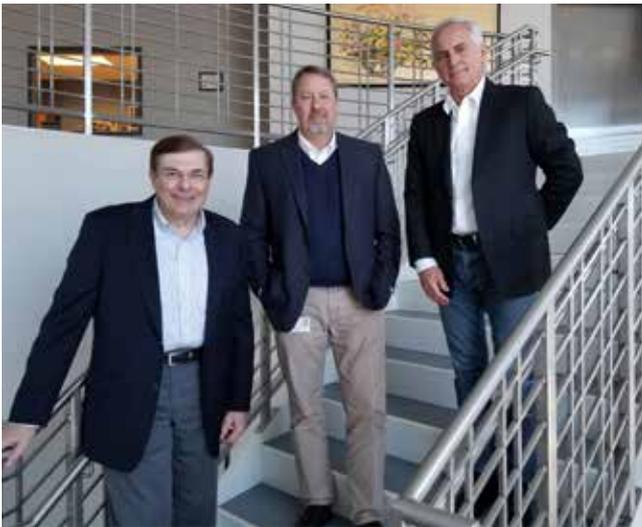
By getting into the PVC market, Kuriyama broadened its appeal to distributors, allowing it entry into many different types of industrial markets. The company has continued to acquire businesses that specialize in different types of hose and serve different sectors in order to broaden its product offering and better serve its customers.

“We acquired Hose Technology in Williamsport, Indiana back in 1997 and what that did for us was get us involved in the metal hose part of the industry, broadening our line card even more,” says Kammes. “With the acquisition, we also acquired additional land, enabling us to build another new factory. We now have three plants that manufacture PVC hose and tubing products: Indiana, Guelph, Ontario and Brantford, Ontario.”

Similarly, Piranha Hose Products (2005) brought the company into the high-pressure sewer and jetting hose and thermoplastic hydraulic markets. With the addition of Piranha Hose Products, Inc., the Kuriyama Group expanded into new technologies which in turn led to the development of more highly sophisticated products.

“When I started at the company 34 years ago, we had a very limited product line,” says Kammes. “Over the years, through acquisitions and additions of our own manufacturing facilities, we have been able to broaden the product





From left to right: Gary Kammes, Corporate Manager - Public Communications, Brian Dutton, Vice President and General Manager, and Les Kraska, President.

line so much that we have become a one-stop-shop supplier. We continue to focus on our core abilities of supplying quality hose and tubing products as well as complementary accessory products for our distributors."

"Integrating the acquired companies has been challenging, but also rewarding," adds Les Kraska, President of Kuriyama of America, Inc. "In order to accomplish the integration, we have strategized to use and share all of our available resources provided by our various facilities. As a result, many new markets and opportunities have surfaced."

Changing landscape

A lot has changed in the half century since Kuriyama was incorporated. As the landscape has changed, the company has had to adapt to stay relevant – and competitive.

As Brian Dutton explains to Hose + Coupling World, the company has had to change its mindset many times over



Piranha Sewer Hose in action.

the past 50 years. For example, when the market started leaning toward permanent crimp technology.

According to Dutton, the traditional method of coupling a hose involved clamping a stem or insert with a band clamp or center punch clamp; something mechanical that would strap around the outside of the hose and be tightened and secured. Now, because of aesthetics and performance, the preferred method is crimping; the process by which a ferule or crimp sleeve is attached to the outside diameter of a hose and clamped to secure the connection.

"It is no longer a matter of just making a hose and saying, 'here it is, now it's up to you to figure out how to keep an end fitting on this.' Those days are gone," he says. "Now, we have to design our hoses and fittings together as an interdependent system."

Pressure on manufacturers to provide solutions for the end user has significantly increased and manufacturers are expected to provide easy-to-use tools; whether it is a search engine on their website, mobile applications, special tables in their literature or even programmable controls on their crimping equipment.

"Many manufacturers outsource the service of technical direction," says Dutton. "We want to offer not just an array of hoses, hose accessories and couplings but also a roadmap that shows you how to put it all together to make the most secure, leak-free and safest connection."

Data availability is another critical change in the market. According to Kammes, customers are starving for information. Where once there were industrial directories, "big green books," that customers would pore over to find products or companies, today that information is expected to be readily available electronically. Moreover, it had better be easy to use and navigate.

"A decade ago, you had websites with PDF files but no search mechanism. You could pay an ad agency to convert PDF files into html, however there was no way of working with it."

Today, Kuriyama's website enables visitors to view the company's latest product information, search for products and pricing and obtain technical information. "Our customers can now easily get the information they need off the website. It makes it a lot easier to present our products and easier for our customers to find what they need."

Despite all of the changes in the industry, the company still values a one-on-one "human touch" approach to dealing with customers. Besides the obvious advantage of building customer loyalty with good customer service, Kuriyama has

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Tigerflex Corporation is established as a joint venture with Kuriyama under "Tigerflex" brand name

1984

Kuriyama Canada, Inc. is established in Brantford, Ontario, Canada as a manufacturer of thermoplastic hose and tubing products

1989

Accuflex Industrial Hose Ltd., a manufacturer of thermoplastic hose and tubing products, is acquired in Guelph, Ontario, Canada

Speaking of innovation...

In response to market demand, Kuriyama has recently announced its first mobile application for iPhone and Android, MyCrimp.

The MyCrimp app provides users with the most up-to-date specifications to properly crimp Kuriyama, Alfagomma® and Piranhaflex™ hydraulic hose and fittings.

also used this strategy to find gaps in the market, identify customer needs and develop products to meet those needs.

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As a manufacturer, Kuriyama does its own compounding, and is capable of changing the physical properties of a material to make it more resistant to risk factors such as ozone, weathering, heat or chemical abrasion.

As a leader in co-extrusion technology, Kuriyama has evolved to manufacture "Next Generation" types of hoses and tubings. "Various hybrids or materials used in our products help keep us front and center with our customers," explains Kraska. "Twenty years ago, Kuriyama's competitive advantage was the breadth of its product line. Today, it still is our mantra to provide the widest assortment of hoses, tubing and accessories to our distributors, but we also offer customized solutions by virtue of our technical capabilities."

Dutton adds: "We do a good job of reflecting empathy to our customers because we love the business and we understand what it's like to be on the other side of the desk. A number of us worked in distribution and we know what the everyday headaches of the industrial distributor are. We try as best as we can to minimize them."

Eye to the future

In 2015, Kuriyama Holdings announced the acquisition of the Tipsa Group of companies with manufacturing operations in Spain and Argentina and sales, marketing and warehousing operations in the United States and Australia.

The key product lines for Tipsa Group are specialty rubber blended layflat products designed for mining, agricultural, irrigation, oil and gas and water transport markets around the world. Tipsa Group is a well-recognized company that has been serving the global market for a number of years.

"This was a big acquisition for us," says Dutton. "In the industrial supply universe, if you want to be a significant



Kuri Tec K-Tough series hose in action.

player on a continent, you have to produce on that continent. The acquisition of the Tipsa group has opened up that possibility for us in Europe, and also provided us with production facilities in South America. These are pretty important places to be in terms of market size and access."

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According to Dutton, while the company always has its eyes open for new opportunities, the focus for the future is organic growth in these new markets, as well as continued integration of the capabilities of those factories with its customer base.

"The factory has the ability to produce products that maybe are a better fit for some of the Kuriyama markets in North America. They are nicely suited for our distribution channels and that's what we're really trying to grow now," he adds.

As always, Kuriyama also plans to focus on improving its customer service and bringing all members of the Kuriyama family up to speed on the technical knowledge that will help them to better serve customer needs, respond to inquiries and provide high-level technical direction. "A big part of our plan involves training," says Dutton. "We call it Kuriyama Academy. It's internal use only right now, and right now it's focused on developing technical product skills for our inside and outside sales people."

1997

Hose Technology, Inc., a manufacturer of metal hose products, is acquired in Williamsport, Indiana

1998

Kuri Tec Manufacturing, Inc. is established in Williamsport, Indiana as a manufacturer of thermoplastic hose and tubing products

2004

The company moves to its present location at 360 E. State Parkway in Schaumburg, Illinois

2005

Piranha Hose Products, a manufacturer of plastic hose products, is acquired in Cadillac, Michigan

2012

Kuriyama Corporation Japan is restructured to become Kuriyama Holdings Corporation

2015

Kuriyama Holdings announces the acquisition of the Tipsa Group of companies

