

Valley Nationally Known

Mold Shapes the Glass at Rodefer-Gleason Plant

During your next visit to the dentist, take a close look about the office. Chances are the cuspidor that you use when the dentist is working on your teeth was made in Bellaire.

At church, glance up toward the ceiling. The glass globes decorated with gold filigree were probably molded in the Rodefer-Gleason plant, as well as the glass surrounding the votive candles.

Purchasing a lamp for the living room? If it is a Stiffel, the crystal glass used as part of the decorating on the lamp base is made at the local company, as are many of the glass globes for street lighting.

The name of "Rodefer-Gleason" glass does not appear on their products, although the Bellaire company is one of the few in Ohio, for that matter, the country, that ships their precision molded pieces around the world.

Even though the company name is not on the product, the work accomplished at this plant is a large extension of glass industry. The company, reaching its 103rd birthday this year was founded by the Rodefer brothers in 1877 and is still a family-owned business today, reaching the fourth generation, with Howard Rodefer as its president.

One of the most important segments of the business is the mold shop, according to Clyde McLeod, foreman of the department, and a master at his craft - making the molds that form the glass for its many uses.

McLeod, a Shadyside resident, has been with the company since 1949 when he graduated from Shadyside High School.

"I began working in the plant by molding television tubes when that industry was at its prime in the late 1940's. After

wood or plaster pattern. This is sent to the foundry and returns to us in cast iron or stainless steel rough cast. We machine the cast to the customers specifications. The glass is formed for the customer in these molds."

Rodefer noted that when the television tube industry dwindled and the manufacturers turned to computerized circuitry, the Rodefer Company, which at that time was mainly the producer of industrial glass parts for industry, purchased Gleason Tiebout Glass Company located in New York state. "This filled the void left by the television tube industry. Many of the molds we use today are 100 years old," he added.

Making the molds for glass is a patient, time-consuming, delicate job. The size of the mold and its design, whether it is prismatic or plain, determines the cost and the hours spent making the cast.

"A single mold can cost the company \$1,000 to \$2,000 or as high as \$10,000 and more," McLeod said.

"We do contract work for McGraw Edison and General Electric. The glass molds that cover the oil gauge on the John Deere tractor are made here. We mold bathroom fixtures and the graduated glass containers used by embalmers.

"This plant molds highway sign lights and the lenses for railroad signal lights, as well as some airport lighting globes. A few years ago we also molded the lighting globes located on the wingtips of small aircraft. Electric meter covers are made here, as are the colored, warning lenses that hold lighting for bridges and radio towers," he continued.

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CLYDE McLEOD...Mold Make

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"I began working in the plant by molding television tubes when that industry was at its prime in the late 1940's. After two years in that service, I started to serve an apprenticeship in the mold shop, which, as it stands today, is the only area of the building with a wood floor," Clyde said.

He noted that the building, located at 21st and Union streets, was the first one in Ohio made of reinforced concrete. "Glass houses, normally made of wood at that time, burned down rather easily because of the heat of the furnaces. The mold shop still has a wood floor because if a mold should drop it would have a softer landing and be somewhat protected than if it would land on a concrete floor."

According to Rick Rodefer, head of product control at the plant and son of Howard Rodefer, the building did burn in 1892. "After the fire, the structure was rebuilt out of reinforced concrete and still stands today. The plant was enlarged in 1904."

"Rodefer-Gleason Glass Company does not own its own molds," according to McLeod. "The molds belong to the customer. The company sends a glass print to us on paper of what they need in the way of a design in glass. In the shop, we make a drawing and build a

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"One of the newest designs sent to us for a mold is for solar cell panels which will go on oil rigs in the sea to collect energy for signaling with a fog horn and signal lighting in case of a power failure," McLeod said.

"This design was first tried in plastic but the sea water was a corrosive agent and Howard Rodefer was instrumental in the design of the glass mold and the company was the first to attempt the production of this particular panel.

In Bellaire, the plant is not hard to spot. The conical shaped furnace is visible from many areas of the community. It holds 15 "pots" in which 15 different types of glass can be made in one day. The furnace is heated to 2,300° Fahrenheit.

For relaxation, McLeod works in his Shadyside garden when he needs a rest from the stress of making the finely-designed molds. He is married and has a son that plays on the football team of his high school alma mater. The molder notes that he is an avid booster of all Shadyside team sports.

McLeod is also one of Rodefer-Gleason's greatest boosters. This company was the first that he went to work for in 1949 and as he says, "I have no plans to leave now after 31 years with the company."



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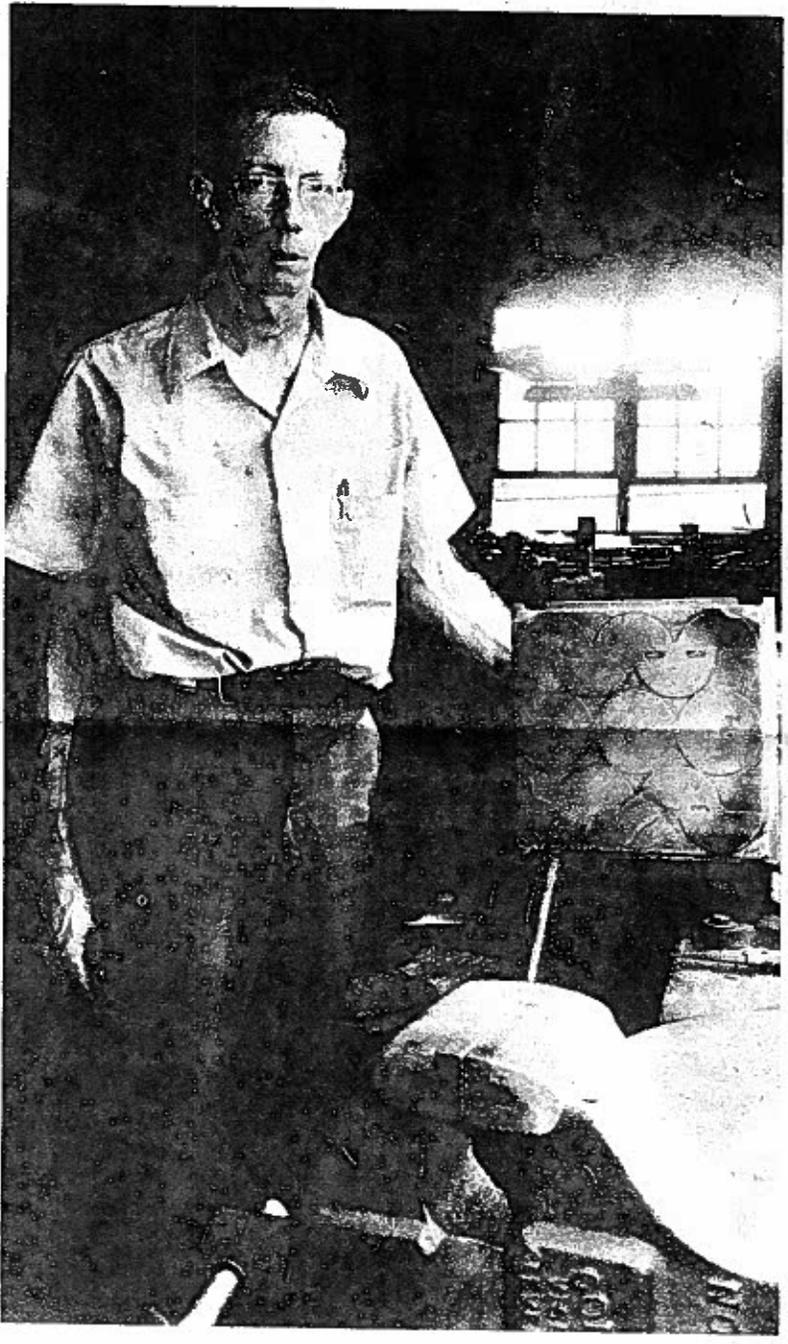
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