

# MADE IN AMERICA WITH A BIG HELPING OF ENCOURAGEMENT

*"My job description is to help customers and employees prosper personally and professionally."*



# MADE ★ IN ★ AMERICA

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## WITH A BIG HELPING OF ENCOURAGEMENT



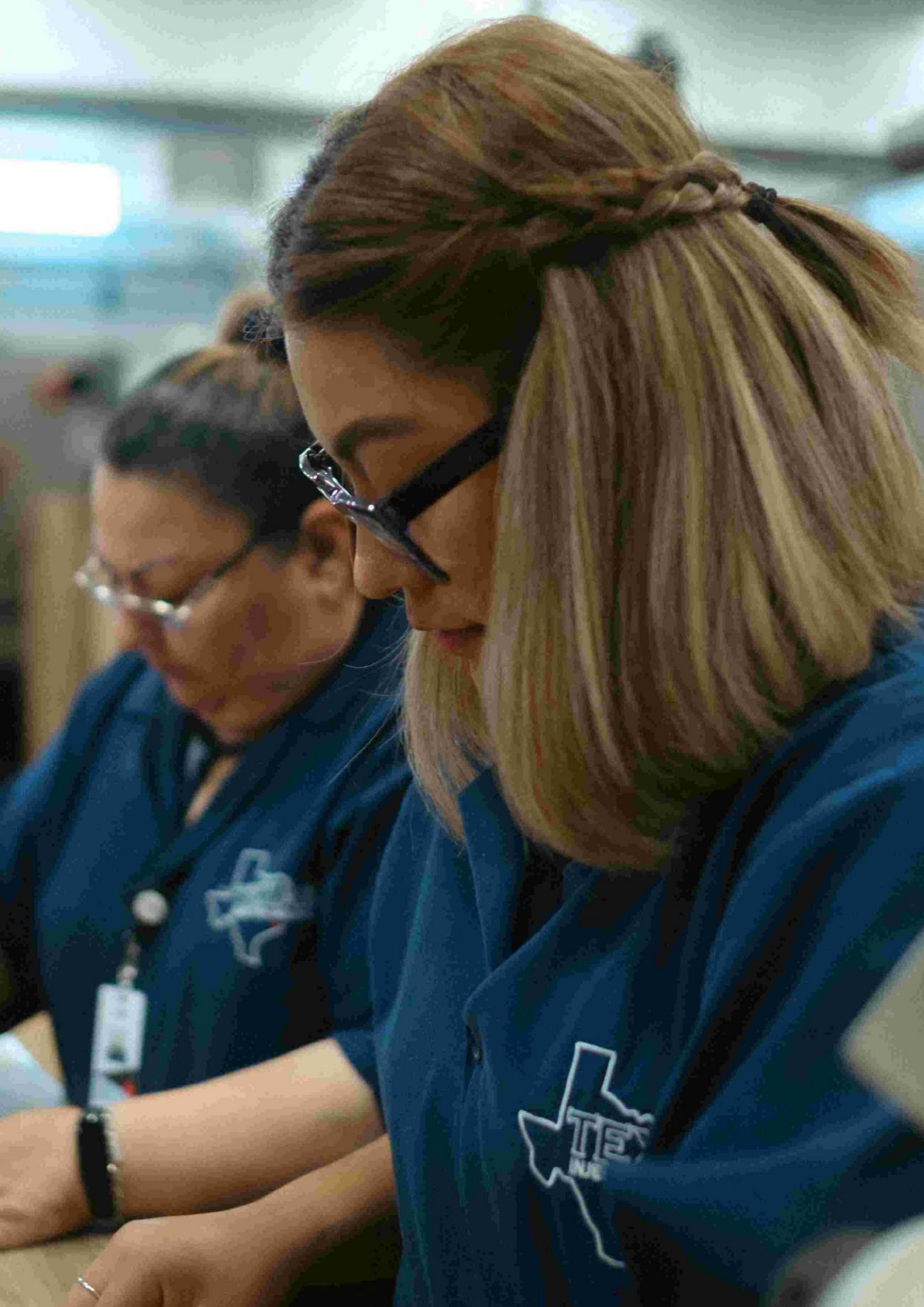
**Written by Robert Hoshowsky**

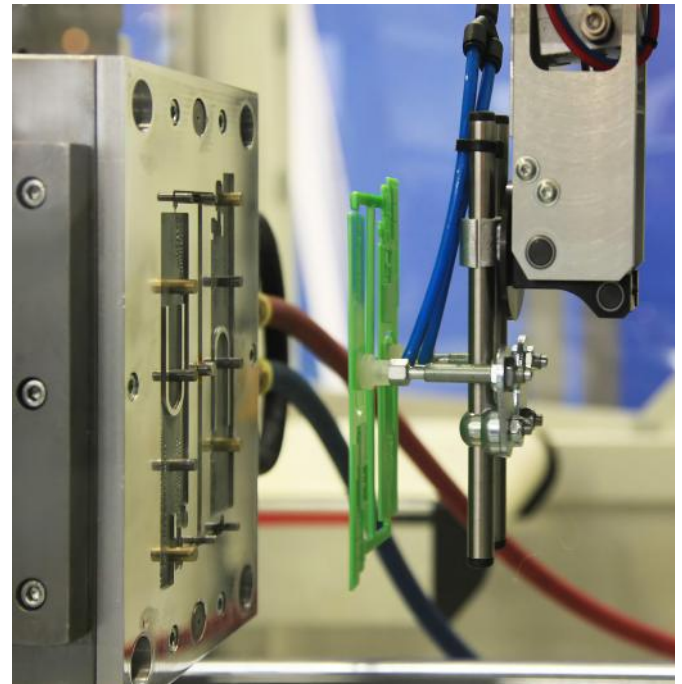
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**T**itles such as President, Vice President, CEO, and COO are par for the course in business. But the CEO of Texas Injection Molding felt he could do better. As a nameplate on Jeff Applegate's desk informs staff and visitors, he is now his company's "Chief Encouragement Officer." For the company, it works very well, and for Applegate, it's also a living tribute to his father—but more about that below.

When he decided to go his own way in his own company in 2013, Applegate researched everything from available web addresses to search terms and marketing. Although undecided on a company name, he knew he didn't want 'plastic' to feature because it was too generic. "But if somebody understands the term 'injection molding,' they know what they're buying," he says. ►







► For his Texas-based, regional service business and contract molder, Applegate acquired several URLs with ‘Texas’ in the name before selecting the one that fit his vision and mission: Texas Injection Molding. A plus was that the name would suit a company that was to be marketed through the internet rather than a sales force, a decision of his that would prove extremely successful.

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“We have had more inquiries than capacity, and that’s how we’ve continued to grow: build more buildings, buy more machines, and expand more than 10 times in the first decade,” says Applegate. “That strategy has been great, and not having outside sales resources is a unique aspect of the business.”

Although CEO from the start, Applegate’s recent transition to “Chief Encouragement Officer” came after Texas Injection Molding received investment from private equity firm Blackford Capital last November. The influx of capital will enable the company to expand further and access Blackford’s wealth of experience “in identifying and integrating acquisitions,” the company says.

Says Blackford CEO Martin Stein, “We have been impressed with Texas Injection Molding’s engineering capabilities, tooling, and resources, and are excited to partner with the team as they take advantage of the many opportunities available in Texas today. We will look to support the business growth across Texas and other high-growth regions across the country by

leveraging our industry and regional experience with Lubbock, Texas-based Industrial Molding Corporation. We’re thrilled to have another investment in Texas, and we’re excited to grow this fantastic business and team.”

Texas Injection Molding’s current management team will remain in their roles, and Applegate is eager to embrace his new position. When he originally purchased the company, Applegate’s dad, Steve, was his greatest champion. Confident in his son’s abilities, Steve not only supported his son morally but also financially, offering to invest 10 percent in the business. Jeff was initially reluctant to accept because of the possible risk, but Steve insisted. “It was wonderful, because not only was it a good financial investment for him, but it gave us something to share and talk about,” says Jeff. “He was my chief encourager.”

Although retired, Steve dedicated his time to helping his son, researching information about injection molding, markets, potential customers, suppliers, and more. “Anybody who knew him knew he was a chief encourager, building other people up. My job description is to help customers and employees prosper personally and professionally. I moved from a coach to a cheerleader, and that’s where Chief Encourager comes through.”

As a sign of his appreciation, Jeff bought business cards for his dad, planning to give them to him for Christmas 2020. Sadly, he never got the chance, with Steve passing away during the pandemic just two weeks before Christmas. The cards bore the title he awarded his father: “Chief Encourager.”

A few years later, when Applegate invited Blackford Capital to come and help grow the business, Jeff took over his dad’s title and became Chief Encourager to the company himself.

## Rooted in quality

ISO 9001:2015 certified, Texas Injection Molding currently operates 33 plastic injection molding machines from 55 to 1,350 tons. Serving a range of sectors including recreation and outdoors, food and beverage, medical and pharmaceutical, business electronics, energy, industrial, and safety, the company operates three shifts, five to seven days a week. Energy, construction, commercial and home components, and components for the air conditioning industry account for a considerable part of the business, and the company has also seen some re-shoring, with manufacturers bringing components back to America—and Applegate expects to see more.

“I feel that now is the most optimistic I have been about manufacturing returning to the United States,” he says. “You are seeing it in the news, the commitments to invest in the U.S.”

Along with some foreign companies in automotive moving manufacturing to America—especially in the economically inviting southern states with their available labor, lower taxes, and other incentives—Applegate has seen investment

in data centers, solar power manufacturing, and other industries. “That’s where we see the opportunities for us to expand beyond Texas and do what we do in areas where there is growth,” he says.

Building a reputation for quality products and timely, professional services, Texas Injection Molding primarily serves industrial OEMs and suppliers of components to other manufacturing companies. On the smaller side of things, the company’s components include grommets or bushings of just a few grams in weight, while larger products include lane delineator curbs bolted to the ground weighing 10 to 15 pounds, large caps covering underground storage tanks holding natural gas or propane, and restaurant grease traps.

Other products include airflow regulators for the air conditioning sector, small valves for soda dispensers, nozzles used on pump ends to thicken food for patients, blow molding of sharps containers for used needles, water meter covers, and even decorative nameplates for companies like Amana and Goodman. ▶▶

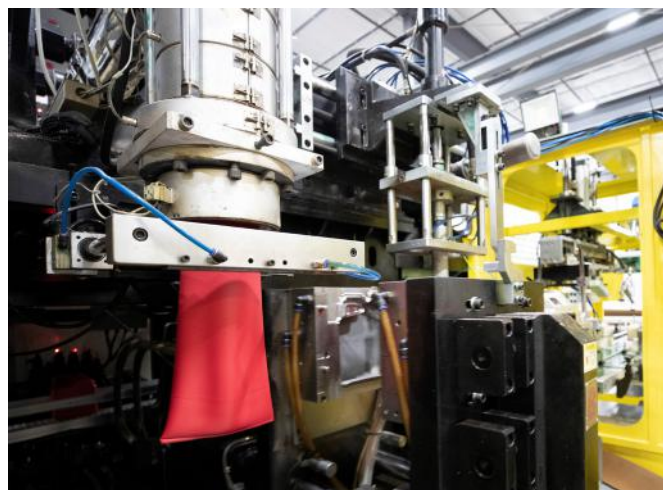


## ► Points of difference

What differentiates Texas Injection Molding from its competitors is that this is much more than just a molding business. Many molding outfits offer nothing more than just ‘shoot and ship’ (which is what it sounds like). In contrast, more than 80 percent of Texas Injection Molding’s products undergo additional operations like assembly, printing, welding, and machining, Applegate estimates. The company even performs contract manufacturing, combining other components, such as springs and screws, with their own molded parts to provide customers with fully manufactured products, including combined subcomponents, which are assembled and packaged in customer boxes. “Contract manufacturing is a differentiator for us,” says Applegate.

And, in addition to injection molding, the company provides a number of value-added services. One example is weighted exercise vests; the company manufactures small plastic containers, fills them with measured lead shot to add weight, and welds on the top.

“We’re pretty entrepreneurial—looking at opportunities, figuring out how much value we can add, and asking how we can be more than just a plastics supplier,” Applegate shares. “Can we be a strategic partner in manufacturing your product? How much



can we do to support you?’ We find places where we can create additional value and be more than a supplier of single products.”

Indeed, customers often approach the team with designs, and the company will offer design for manufacturing services. These include suggesting ways to save money, the most suitable materials—whether nylon, ABS, or polycarbonate—and suggesting a radius instead of sharp corners, where suitable, to make products stronger. The company also works with recommended expert designers in injection molding.

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## The place for people

The company has a staff of about 200, many of whom are long-timers. And while skills are certainly important, Applegate says that in an intensive operation like this, respect for one another is paramount. Manufacturing around 450 different parts using approximately 120 different materials, and running about 30 different products every day, Texas Injection Molding is a fast-moving operation responsible for millions of parts every month.

“If I can get my employees and team to respect and care for each other, they will care for everything else, including the building and the products they’re producing,” says Applegate. “Dedicated people stay because they feel they are cared for, part of a team. When things get tough, they will stick around. The difference between a good company and a great company is the culture.”

This dedication saw the company win **Plastic News’** Best Places to Work 2025 award. For the award, employees were surveyed through an independent company and discussed everything from work environment to opportunities for advancement, compensation, benefits, culture, and how they compare to industry peers.

## Building for the future

Operating from a 90,000-square-foot location, Texas Injection Molding continues to grow and plans to add three more machines in 2026. With the help of Blackford Capital, the company intends to expand in the southwest and southeast, essentially building a regionally positioned injection molding resource to cover the entire southern half of the United States.

“Our strategy is *people, process, and technology*: have great manufacturing processes; give them the technology to do their jobs,” Applegate says.

“But the differentiator is when you can wrap people, process, and technology in culture, where people genuinely respect and care for one another. Then you’ve got something special.” ■



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