L A CROSSE — The ups and downs of the oil and agriculture industries reaches throughout northwest Kansas, but a home-grown company demonstrates that, when well-tended like its namesake, business will remain steady and even grow.

For 58 years, Flame Engineering has produced propane torches for farming, industrial and roofing applications, and has even branched out into products for homeowners.

Branded as Red Dragon, its products can be found in wholesalers across the country like Ace Hardware, True Value and Orscheln Farm and Home, and 28 countries including Australia, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Peru and South Africa. Sales Manager Mel Limon recently returned from a trip to El Salvador.

With approximately 30 employees at its facility on the north side of La Crosse, the company has a diversified customer base across the world that helps it withstand the ups and downs of the market, said CEO Mike Pivonka.

“We’re fortunate in that we sell to hardware stores, ag stores, pipeline, oil patch,” he said.

“We don’t have all our eggs in one basket. We’re pretty diversified in the people that use our product,” said Linda Miller, human resource manager and an employee since 1990.

Mike Pivonka, CEO of Flame Engineering, talks about the bell of one of the torches manufactured at the company in La Crosse.

Greg Pfannenstiel welds together parts at Flame Engineering.

Tyson Pivonka, grandson of Flame Engineering CEO Mike Pivonka and the fourth generation to work for the company, works on one of the manufacturing floors at the factory.

Flame Engineering is located at 230 W. Highway 4 in La Crosse.

story by juno ogle
photos by jolie green
A pile of tubing for torch kits sits in the factory. Miller said of the CSA certification that tests gas, electrical, and allows the recipient to have to make a few changes to the machine, if it was operator training is conducted on schedule. Every employee is mandated to conduct quarterly safety training. The company also conducts investigations in “near-miss” reports, which is another way to identify potential safety hazards and makes sure safety training is conducted on schedule. The company has over 27 employees in the La Crosse facility, and around 1,500 employees worldwide. The CSA certification is conducted quarterly, and it does random checks on our sales, he said. "It’s a major product for us," Engel said. Another customer said Flame encourages local businesses to buy Red Dragon products through retailers. "If we can get our products in front of the big box companies than they can think of us because we can work with our distributor," Miller said. "But if the company doesn't expect big box, that's fine." Flame Engineering looks for work on flat roofs. That is a result of the company's business plan. "Now it's a major product for Flame Engineering," Engel said. "It's a pretty simple device — a nozzle can light almost anything. They can even be used for lighting our gas Californians," Miller said. "We're kind of thinking that may help us," he said. "It's tough to compete with our Chinese companies that have identical products to what we sell. Even though it might cost a few more dollars, we could actually buy them for what our material cost. No one else makes it around communities, that way, so we have to have quality, we have to have a number of products, that is the most important thing. None of the other firms make the imported stuff at pretty good quality." Flame is a company that has flown to its customers. The roofing products came about after several months of testing. "It's a simple device — a nozzle can light almost anything. They can even be used for lighting our gas California," Miller said. "We're kind of thinking that may help us," he said. "It's tough to compete with our Chinese companies that have identical products to what we sell. Even though it might cost a few more dollars, we could actually buy them for what our material cost. No one else makes it. None of the other firms make the imported stuff at pretty good quality." Flame is a company that has flown to its customers. The roofing products came about after several months of testing. "It's a simple device — a nozzle can light almost anything. They can even be used for lighting our gas Californians," Miller said. "We're kind of thinking that may help us," he said. "If the oil starts coming up again, that will help too." "If the oil starts coming up again, that will help too." "If the oil starts coming up again, that will help too." "If the oil starts coming up again, that will help too." "If the oil starts coming up again, that will help too." "If the oil starts coming up again, that will help too." "If the oil starts coming up again, that will help too."