

agement of the dies and billet on the extrusion lines is essential for an extruder to achieve maximum product quality and efficient output. Wrong temperature settings can lead to defective profiles and in the worst case may destroy a die.

"We need to have a good overview of the extruder's process in order to give them valuable advice on how to adjust or optimize their process," said Beckert. "Both WEFA and extrutec are involved in providing this kind of process management advice to our customers so that they can effectively extrude and sell their profiles. This is a part of our shared philosophy and the basis for starting our cooperation."

Targeting North America

Despite recent challenges surrounding U.S. tariffs on the import of billet and the COVID-19 pandemic, the North American extrusion industry has largely stayed strong—with further growth on the horizon. In the past several months, both the U.S. and Canada have introduced national infrastructure plans focused on renewable energy initiatives in order to promote job growth, which will likely provide a boost in demand for aluminum products.

North America has been a part of WEFA's strategy since 2009, when the company launched its Cedar Springs facility (the die maker's first operations outside of Europe). "Since then, we have been trying to expand the market in the U.S. and North America in general," said Beckert. "This is not an easy task, though we've had some success here and there. We hope that by working together, we will be able to make that success grow."

On the other hand, extrutec has primarily been focused on European and international markets and is looking to

enter and expand its presence in North America. "It's important for us to be present in all major markets," noted Günter. "The U.S. market in particular is very large and interesting to us, providing a motivation for us to start activities in the region."

Strategic Cooperation

With the signing of the LOI, WEFA and extrutec will move forward in supporting each other's business in North America. Though discussions are still underway on the specific details of the cooperation, the companies plan to begin with providing support from a marketing perspective, helping to educate their customers in the U.S., Canada, and Mexico about each company's products and how they can work together to support extruders in optimizing the extrusion process. "Both companies want to support each other developing technical advantages and servicing their products going forward," said Beckert. "Working together will provide a win-win situation for each of us, and our customers."

The next stage of the process will be to provide extrutec with a physical presence in the U.S. Since WEFA's die manufacturing operations only take up a small part of their Cedar Springs facility, there is ample room for extrutec to set up administrative offices and possibly a small service center on the site.

Further down the road, WEFA and extrutec may turn to investigating the development of new technologies for further optimizing die management or extrusion processes. "I think this is just naturally how things occur," said Günter. "The more people work together and are open to new things, the more likely they generate new innovative ideas. I definitely expect new ideas to develop." ■

