



2023 Minnesota Manufacturing Awards: American Crystal Sugar banks on community, employee development

By Mary Ellen Ritter – Contributing writer

A 50-year-old company and iconic Minnesota-based brand, American Crystal Sugar Co. is known for processing sugar beets into all-natural sugar and other agri-products such as molasses, sugar beet pulp and other byproducts. The company, led by CEO Thomas Astrup, also strives to better the state of Minnesota by investing in agriculture and the food manufacturing industry.

Even more notably, the company invests in Minnesota communities and its own employees, and is the 2023 Excellence in Training & Education honoree for the Business Journal's sixth annual Minnesota Manufacturing Awards.

In 2022, Moorhead-based American Crystal Sugar provided over 100 scholarships to Red River Valley students, each scholarship equaling \$1,000. The company also has donated over \$200,000 in grants to assist STEM programs, robotics organizations, community sports fields, rural fire departments and assisted living facilities.

“We are your neighbors and partners in a vibrant community and our employees contribute greatly to our success,” said Belinda Forknell, the company's communications manager. “While

that's rewarding and positive for our company, our true pride is in the community involvement of our people. Whether they volunteer their time to an organization or donate with their pocketbooks, they make a difference. We encourage and support their community involvement efforts offering programs to them for in-kind donations, matching gifts, and matching funds for volunteer hours."

Internally, American Crystal Sugar has worked diligently to improve the company as a whole and employees at an individual level by organizing a leadership development program which focuses on fostering accountability, developing a common shared language, and building stronger communities in the company. Since the program's 2019 start, nearly 400 team members have taken advantage of this opportunity, and the company has seen workforce accountability, morale and motivation positively improve.

"I believe the biggest reason American Crystal has been successful is the thousands of people with different backgrounds working toward a common goal and advancing their own personal skills and development to help us get there," Astrup said. "That commitment to purpose is so critically important. And if people with different stakes in the business can agree on that, we will keep growing and achieve great success."

Fast facts:

CEO: Thomas Astrup

Headquarters: Moorhead

Revenue: Not provided

Minnesota employees: 1,704

Year founded: 1973

Business: Processes sugar beets into all-natural sugar and agri-products

Web: crystalsugar.com