

Mission Essential

Chromal Plating keeps Minuteman missiles operational 40-plus years

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VANDENBERG AFB, Calif. -- "Mission Essential" is the best way to describe the Chromal Plating Company. This woman-owned family business has kept Minuteman Missile launch component parts operational for 40-plus years.

The company structure includes the mother, Ethel Bokelman, at the helm, and her children, Ray Bokelman Jr., Robin Osborn and Diane Remlinger, running the operations acquired by Ray Bokelman Sr. in 1983. The company is located in a HUBZone; approximately 40 percent of their employees live within the boundaries of this central Los Angeles region.



Homer "Fergie" Ferguson, production controller for the 581st Material Command Support Group, shows the chrome-plated interior of an actuator. (Courtesy photo)

"We take great pride in maintaining military parts."

Ray Bokelman Jr.
Chromal Plating Company

The Chromal Plating Company refurbishes parts for the Air Force, Army, NASA and the FAA as well as Lockheed, Boeing and Northrop Grumman. The firm grew through the 1980s until Ray Sr.'s death in 1988. Resilient and determined, his widow moved into the presidency and put her sense for business to work.

Their role for the Air Force is to overhaul and refurbish critical parts such as the 100-inch-long ballistic actuators that open the 110-ton doors at all Minuteman launch facilities. There is the only facility in the western United States with a plating vat large enough to accomplish this vital task. "Racking" a part takes hours of highly skilled labor to intricately mask each item before submerging it in the electrolytic bath of chromium.

Osborn said most of their 31 employees have been with Chromal Plating more than 25 years. Pedro Padilla, an employee since 1972, now works side-by-side with his sons, Jesus and Chava.

The 17,000-square-foot plant is a safe, environment-friendly workplace. In 1990 Ray Jr. invented a three-phase filtering system that removes toxins from the vapor off the vats. Once filtered, any residual particles are recycled and the waste water is purified for reuse. The National Association of Metal Finishers recognized Ray Jr.'s contribution to California south coast air quality with their "Award of Merit - Job Shop Metal Finishing Industry" in 1991.

Homer "Fergie" Ferguson, production controller for the 581st Material Command Support Group, has inspected thousands of components serviced by the Chromal Plating Company since 2000. He praised their uncompromising quality, attention to detail and timely delivery.

"It's a real pleasure to have had our hands in the Minuteman program for nearly 50 years," said Ray Jr. "We take great pride in maintaining military parts."