



PHOTOS COURTESY OF CHARLES ERICKSON

Old-fashioned manufacturing: Ernest Gerbitz spot welds a strainer basket at Kraissl Company.

## UNIQUE HACKENSACK

# Business is no strain at Kraissl

BY CHARLES ERICKSON  
Correspondent

The Kraissl Company has operated from a triangular-shaped building on the south side of Hackensack since 1933. Viewed from Blauvelt Place, the structure looks like a large boat, with Old Hoboken Road on the port side, Williams Avenue starboard, and East Kennedy Street astern.

The watercraft resemblance is accidental but appropriate for a concern whose wares are still used in various maritime applications.

"These are odd, very carefully specified products," said Dick Michel, Kraissl's president and grandson of its founder, describing the company's simplex and duplex strainers, transfer valves and transfer pumps.

"We design, build, manufacture, assemble, test — all right here."

Much about the Kraissl Co., including its products, its quarters, its machine tools and its office fixtures, appear to have been removed from a time capsule. The Hackensack building, a former steamroller warehouse, is the company's only facility.

Sales of the company's Model 72 simplex and duplex strainers contribute about two-thirds of the company's annual revenues, according to Michel.

The basic design of the Model 72 has not changed much. The duplex versions are H-shaped, with strainer baskets held inside the cylindrical legs. They are commonly used for straining impurities from fuel and lubrication oils, and debris from the water used to cool marine engines.

"This is mechanical filtration," Michel said. "There's nothing fancy about it. It's low-tech."

Kraissl (pronounced "cry-sull") was

established in Manhattan by Fred Kraissl in 1926. Michel's father, Bob, married Fred Kraissl's daughter.

Dick Michel holds 52 percent of the company's shares. An employee stock ownership plan owns the rest.

Business, said Michel, had improved — but the commercial environment remains difficult. Nearly every part of a Kraissl product is made of metal, and the prices of iron, steel and bronze are significantly higher than a few years ago.

"There's more dollar volume coming back, but it's harder to make a profit on it," Michel said. He said profits have never been huge within the narrow industrial niche Kraissl has occupied for 80 years.

There are 17 employees. Two decades ago they had 50 people on the payroll, and manufactured more of the components used in final assembly. Jobs were cut when the company got rid of

its expensive computer-controlled machine tools and began sourcing the parts from subcontractors.

"If I can't pick it up, we machine it here," Michel said. "That's sort of the economic test, oddly. Heavy, big stuff, we have to machine here."

Most of the machine tools are large and old. In some cases, Kraissl Co. is their third or fourth owner. Spare machines are cannibalized for parts.

"We keep the old monster machines that nobody else would have but us, because we need them," Michel said, sitting behind an old wooden table inside the company's conference room, which features a bank of metal filing cabinets. Ledger books going back nearly 50 years are kept in an office down the hall. From these volumes Michel said he could easily retrieve the specifics of an

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Glenn Broadway uses a radial drill to put holes in the flange of a strainer being assembled by Kraissl Co.



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## KRAISSL

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order filled in 1961.

This is not a mass-production facility. An employee might assemble and test a relatively small filter immediately after working on a giant one that is lifted with a hoist.

"If we make a hundred of anything, that's a lot," Michel said. "We don't make thousands of anything."

Products from Kraissl of Hackensack will soon be installed at Mars of Hackettstown.

"We're making some stainless steel simplex strainers for M & M Mars for the chocolate," Michel said. "Anything that flows: molasses, animal fat, chocolate. Viscous fluids are our favorites."

Kraissl has had a Web presence since Michel registered [strainers.com](http://strainers.com) in 1990.

The Internet is considered more of an informational tool than a generator of sales. People that find the Kraissl name in raised lettering

on an ancient piece of cast metal regularly telephone or email to confirm the company remains in business.

Michel, like his father a professional engineer trained at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, touted the American-made aspect of Kraissl products. He also lamented the decline in U.S. manufacturing. At 56, he can remember when more vessels and industrial boilers were made in domestic factories.

Many of those plants are gone now, but some remain – including one in Hackensack shaped like a Great Lakes freighter. Inside, Dick Michel's employees make strainers and transfer valves and transfer pumps the same way employees made them for his father and his grandfather.

"Part of my interest in this," Michel said, "is to take people and put them to work on something that is worth doing, and something that we need, and that they can do and not be out of work."