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Manufacturing Week: Acrow Bridges (Parsippany) — This company is ready to take on infrastructure issues across the state
By Meg Fry
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Bill Killeen, president of Acrow Bridge:
"We're great in emergencies, because we stock our bridges."
(Photo by Aaron Houston)

As parents take their kids to school, employees travel home from work and ambulances and fire trucks race to the scene of an accident, they're putting their trust in the workers who paved the roads, put up the guardrails — and manufactured the bridges.

It's a huge responsibility that Bill Killeen, president of Acrow Bridges, takes seriously.

"People are driving across these bridges to their families and businesses, and we want to get them there safely," Killeen said.

Parsippany-based Acrow Bridges has spent more than 57 years designing, engineering, manufacturing and supplying prefabricated modular steel bridges and emergency "shoring systems" used to support structures at risk of collapsing.

The bridges were manufactured in England up until the late 1970s, when Killeen, who was working as an engineer, redesigned the structures and helped bring the operation to the U.S. He then acquired the company in 1999, when it had about \$5 million in annual revenue. Over the last five years, though, Acrow Bridges has averaged almost \$75 million.

The kicker is that, while Acrow Bridges employs 30 at its headquarters in Parsippany (and 120 nationwide) its hot-rolled steel components are manufactured and fabricated in Milton, Pennsylvania — not New Jersey.

"We looked at a couple of New Jersey manufacturers, but there was a lack of interest back in the 1990s," Killeen said.

Milton Steel — which Acrow Bridges acquired in 2011 — “was very eager to get into this product line.”

It's a popular item to manufacture, according to Killeen, but he doesn't worry too much about other solid competitors in the U.S.

“We keep the user of the bridge in mind, so our competitive nature is subservient to just wanting to do what's right,” Killeen said.

Acrow Bridges distinguishes itself with its strong customer support, offering assistance and maintenance for its products indefinitely into the future.

But most clients don't need their bridges for that long.

“Here in the U.S. the majority of the bridges we install are rented for six to 24 months at a time,” Killeen said.

Notable projects include its 2002 ramp from Liberty Street to Ground Zero in New York City to assist in the cleanup and dismantling of the World Trade Center towers, plus a temporary bridge to replace then-collapsed Interstate 5 in Washington in 2013.

“We're great in emergencies, because we stock our bridges,” Killeen said.

“Whether they're a mile long or 6 feet long, all can fit within 40-foot ocean containers.”

New Jersey may need some of those, soon.

“It's often the larger bridges — such as the Pulaski Skyway — that catch our attention, but it's really the secondary bridges and roadways that we drive over every morning without even realizing they are most in need,” Killeen said.

“Our highway transportation bill is a major issue that Washington keeps kicking down the road — so despite appearances, construction has slowed because the states are concerned the money won't be there.”

When the money comes available, Acrow will be ready. In fact, it feels they it is in the perfect place to take advantage.

With a storage depot in Lafayette, galvanizers in Perth Amboy, shipping ports in Port Newark, Elizabeth and New York City and its headquarters only 150 miles away from its factory in Pennsylvania, New Jersey is still geographically ideal for Acrow Bridges.

“From New Jersey, we can really focus on the opportunities in the export market,” Killeen said.