

Home away from home



Truma's brand-new US headquarters brings new capabilities and opportunities for the venerable brand.

Words and photo Craig Ritchie

No building is any stronger than its foundation, and no company can truly prosper without a solid base beneath it. That being the case, the future looks very bright indeed for Truma Corp., which opened an all-new corporate headquarters for its US division in late August.

Located at 2800 Harman Drive in the core of Elkhart, Indiana's RV industry, Truma's new US headquarters is a brand-new, 48,000 sq ft (4,459 sq m) facility that houses the company's corporate offices, an extensive warehouse space, two RV service bays and a unique climate chamber capable of accommodating the largest Class A motorhomes. Two fully-serviced RV sites adjacent to the building – complete with electricity and water – offer comfortable overnight accommodations for visiting customers who wish to have early morning access to the service bays. The new facility represents a considerable upgrade from the company's previous location in a small office building in downtown Elkhart. "At that time we were only three people,"

says Truma North America president and CEO, Gerhard Hundsberger. "But we have grown quickly and now we are 25 people, so we didn't have any space at all. Beyond that, our service facility and our warehouse facilities were in different locations so it was very awkward from a logistical perspective."

With a growth strategy mapped out over the next several years, it was imperative that the company secure the space it needed to be successful. Following a comprehensive search, the company acquired a five acre (2.0 ha) building lot in north-east Elkhart with excellent access to major highways. "The building itself is the largest that we could fit onto the lot while respecting codes and municipal retention areas," says Hundsberger. "We were determined to use as much space as we could, so the warehouse and service bays span about 38,000 sq ft (3,530 sq m) and the offices are about 10,000 sq ft (929 sq m) over two levels."

A truly unique design

The modern design of the facility reflects more than 18 months of detailed planning, working with two architects. Hundsberger wanted a building that would remain in keeping with the style of other Truma properties in Europe, yet retaining the functionality required to conduct business efficiently in the North American market. The resulting design incorporates elements from other Truma facilities in Germany and the UK, but does not mirror their overall design.

One key aspect of the new facility is its open office concept with plenty of window space and fresh air – a far cry from the way employ-

ees were doubled up sharing small individual rooms in the previous building. The sense of open, accessible space is enhanced by the utilization of low-profile, adaptable partitions throughout, a neutral colour scheme, and free-standing conference pods that provide efficient meeting spaces for small groups. The generous use of sound-absorbing acoustic materials throughout ensures a relaxing environment while preventing meetings or telephone conversations from disturbing other employees working nearby.

Truma has made a significant commitment to the health and well-being of its Elkhart employees with the provision of ergonomic desks and seating. Desks utilize pneumatic adjustments so they can be used in either the standing or seated position. "The employees love that," says Hundsberger. "As you walk through you will see some people sitting, and others standing. It is a far healthier approach, and far more comfortable."

The majority of Truma employees – and certainly those who are in the office each day – work at an assigned desk. Others who are in the office intermittently, such as salespeople, use a hoteling arrangement with shared desk spaces. All benefit from state-of-the-art telephone and Wi-Fi, and enjoy an inviting employee lounge and kitchen area with double refrigerators, microwaves and dishwashers. Throughout, large thermal windows provide outstanding natural light while insulating against greenhouse-like thermal heating.

Meet the TEC

With most of the office spaces located on the building's second floor, the ground level fea-



Truma Elkhart Climate Chamber



tures a welcoming reception centre and a product showroom, where Truma's latest products can be demonstrated in comfort. There's also a training facility on-site, known as the TEC – short for Truma Education Centre, where service and sales presentations can be delivered with full access to the entire facility. Typical service training classes can accept up to 20 people, far more than could have ever been accommodated in the former office. *"We're very happy with the training opportunities that this new building represents,"* says Hundsberger. *"Training is very hands-on, with many appliances in the room. For training purposes we will build-in some errors or failures into the sample products, then task the service technicians to diagnose and repair the product. So it is not just theoretical training, but a very strong hands-on component. And the amount of space we have here facilitates that."*

Truma's new headquarters was designed with an eye to environmental efficiency as well. An eco-friendly, geothermal HVAC system offers tremendous heating and cooling efficiency, while LED lighting throughout – controlled by motion sensors that turn lights off when they're not being used – help reduce both the building's environmental footprint and energy costs alike. The company is considering adding a rooftop solar system in the next year to further boost its energy efficiency.



Major milestone

The opening of its new Elkhart facility represents a major milestone for Truma beyond gaining efficiency by combining its existing operations under a single roof. It also confirms that the company is quickly coming of age in the US. *"Our long-term strategy consists of different steps,"* says Hundsberger. *"One, to become established in the US market with a rented facility, and building relationships with our customers and the end-users. Two, to build our own headquarters here, which we have now done."*

Service with distinction

As impressive as the corporate offices are, the heart of Truma's new headquarters lies along its northern face, where a pair of large entry doors provide access to its twin service bays. Large enough to handle the biggest RVs on the road, the two oversized service bays provide repairs and new product installations by Truma technicians.

A third door adjacent to the service bays opens to provide direct drive-in access to Truma's unique climate chamber. While more common in Europe, a full-size environmental chamber is still a bit of a novelty in North America, giving Truma a decided competitive advantage. Large enough to completely enclose a Class A motorhome, the massive chamber can be set to simulate winter or summer conditions at any time of year, with a temperature range of -13F (-25C) to more than 113F (45C) – all with fully controllable humidity levels. *"You park the unit and leave it in the chamber overnight to give it time to reach the desired temperature,"* explains Hundsberger. *"Then you can go in and test the furnace or the air conditioning. Thermal imaging cameras make it quick and easy to identify any problem areas."*

Beyond providing Truma an opportunity to perform climate testing on its own products, the environmental chamber also provides an opportunity to evaluate competitor's units and perform direct comparisons. *"Temperature sensors can measure multiple different points in the vehicle, so a technician can see where the heat distribution goes based on the existing layout of elements like air ducts,"* notes Hundsberger. *"We can go back to the unit manufacturer with specific recommendations, showing how they can make changes to provide more efficient heating and cooling. It's extremely valuable feedback to the manufacturers, because absolutely no one wants their customers to be uncomfortable."*

Beyond the climate chamber, the east end of the building is devoted to warehouse space, enabling Truma to stock more components than before and turn orders around faster and more efficiently. It also provides an opportunity to diversify the product line in North America. *"We started with the products and systems which we thought would be the most appropriate for the North American market,"* says Hundsberger. *"And we have developed products specifically for the North American market, like the Truma AquaGo and Truma Vario-Heat. So it's just a matter of time when we will add more systems for the North American market. We will introduce the Truma Cooler here in January, it's a portable refrigerator and freezer which was intensively tested under extreme conditions in Australia. Truma is all about quality, innovation and service. If a given product is a fit to our customer's needs, then it is very likely that we are going to bring it to North America."*



Truma - Alde

Perhaps the most striking aspect of Truma's new US headquarters isn't so much the building itself, as the signage on the outside. The Truma name over the doors is to be expected. But right there beside it is another familiar logo – Alde. *"What we found over the years was that it just makes sense to bring these companies together here in North America,"* explains Hundsberger. *"We're still both small companies and we see a lot of synergies by bringing them together in this market. In the past, both companies tried to build up a dealer network, service network, training – these are areas where anyone can immediately see the synergies. Why have two salespeople going to visit the same customer?"*

On the right: Gerhard Hundsberger

