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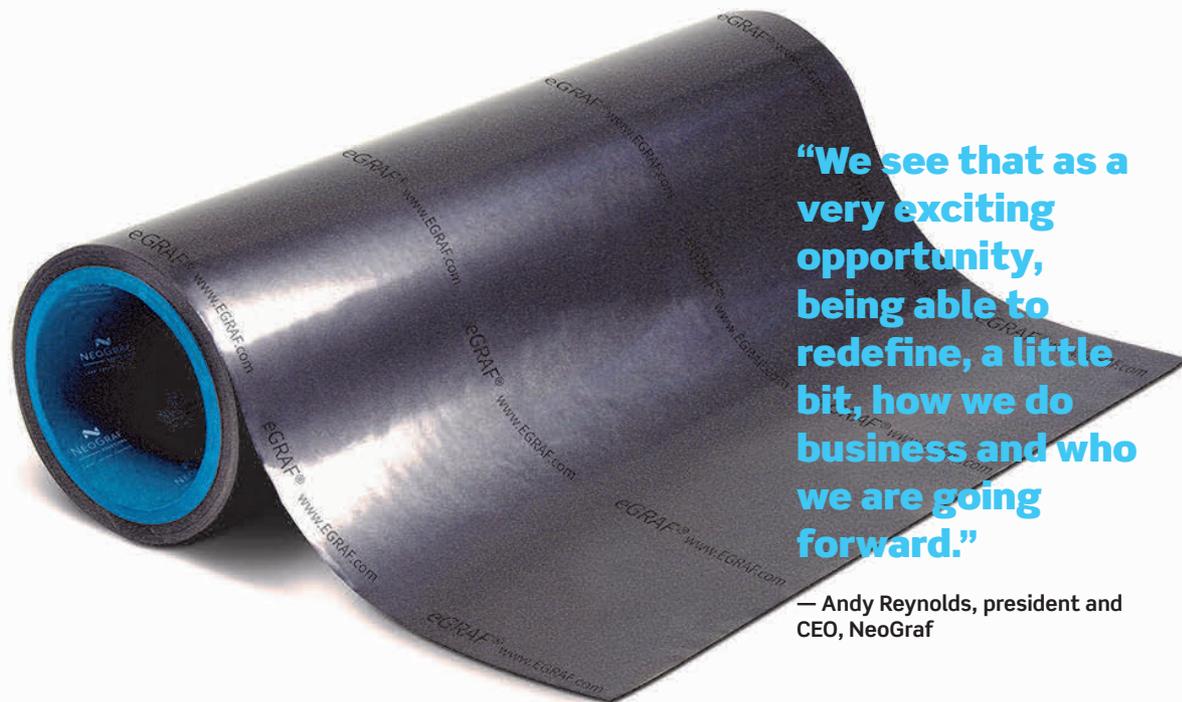


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“We see that as a very exciting opportunity, being able to redefine, a little bit, how we do business and who we are going forward.”

— Andy Reynolds, president and CEO, NeoGraf

NeoGraf, formerly a division of GrafTech, makes treated natural graphite in sheet and flake form, as well as synthetic-based graphite sheet products. (Contributed photo)

Lakewood company has new name, same focus

Former GrafTech subsidiary, now NeoGraf, was sold in June

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Northeast Ohio has a new graphite company.

Well, kind of. NeoGraf Solutions officially launched as an independent company this summer, but the facility in Lakewood where it's headquartered has been making graphite products for decades, most recently as part of GrafTech International.

An affiliate of New York-based Aterian Investment Partners purchased what is now known as NeoGraf from GrafTech in June of 2017.

The products made by NeoGraf are used in a variety of applications, including products that control heat in electronics such as smartphones and TVs. And that is an application for graphite, both natural and synthetic, that has grown drastically in recent years, said Andy Reynolds, the recently named president and CEO of NeoGraf.

Reynolds joined GrafTech's corporate research center in 2000 — his first job in the non-academic side of the industry — and worked his way up to general manager for the company's advanced energy technologies business. Aterian asked him to take on the CEO role after the sale.

Aterian did not respond to requests for comment, but in a news release on the sale, principal Brandon Bethea said the firm was “excited to acquire NeoGraf, not only for its longstanding leadership position within the synthetic and natural flexible graphite market, but also for the opportunity to partner with the management team in the next stage of NeoGraf's growth.”

GrafTech, which had been taken private by Brookfield Asset Management Inc. in August 2015, announced plans to review its engineered solutions segment, which included the advanced energy technologies unit, in 2016. Reynolds said the advanced energy technologies division was

NeoGraf Solutions LLC at a glance

■ 11709 Madison Ave., Lakewood

■ About 180 employees

■ NeoGraf may be a new company, but the Lakewood plant where it's headquartered was first founded in 1886 as National Carbon Co.

turned into a subsidiary in the fall of 2016 to make a sale easier, and the sale to Aterian was completed at the end of June 2017. Reynolds declined to comment on the sale price for NeoGraf, and GrafTech and Brookfield did not respond to requests for comment.

So far, Aterian has been focused on growth. Reynolds said NeoGraf has added employees in finance and sales. Adding or growing corporate functions has been a challenge, but a welcome one.

“We see that as a very exciting opportunity, being able to redefine, a little bit, how we do business and who we are going forward,” Reynolds said.

NeoGraf has about 180 employees, about 160 of whom are at the Lakewood and Sharon Center sites. The rest are in global sales and technical support. Reynolds declined to share annual revenue.

And Aterian has encouraged NeoGraf to look at possible capital investment projects where it might be able to bring some services in-house and even inorganic growth opportunities.

Lakewood Mayor Mike Summers was surprised to hear about the new company, but said it was exciting that Lakewood was now its headquarters. The plant on Madison Avenue has a lot of “historical importance” to the city, as it was originally a draw for the immigrant population.

“We're very emotionally attached to it,” Summers said.

The NeoGraf Solutions name is designed to highlight both the newness of the organization — neo meaning new — and its “heritage,” Reynolds said. The company's new logo and

imagery were finalized recently, and Reynolds said he hopes the new branding is complete by Jan. 1.

What's now known as NeoGraf makes treated natural graphite in sheet and flake form, as well as synthetic-based graphite sheet products. The flake product is often used in products that need fire resistance, Reynolds said, like shingles or industrial roofing. The natural graphite can be used for products in industrial settings with high temperatures or otherwise corrosive environments, and both it and the synthetic product are used in electronics. In consumer electronics, the graphite products made by companies like NeoGraf are used to improve the performance of the devices, keeping heat in check.

The synthetic-based graphite product, which GrafTech started selling commercially in 2009, can be made much thinner than natural graphite, Reynolds said, an advantage as products like TVs and smartphones grow thinner. The synthetic product also has some thermal performance benefits, but it is more expensive. The polymers used as the base ingredients have to be heated and converted first into carbon and then into graphite.

“We have to artificially do what nature did for us for free,” Reynolds said.

While NeoGraf has been making graphite products for quite some time, Reynolds still sees potential for innovation. For example, there are opportunities to take advantage of graphite's different properties to replace multiple layers of material in a given product, basically letting a customer consolidate their product from something like five layers to two. That would let customers make thinner products for a lower cost.

Another area of interest is the hybrid-electric vehicles and electric vehicles market. There's a lot of heat to be managed in those products, Reynolds said, and opportunities to use that heat in other ways — such as defrosting applications — throughout the vehicles.



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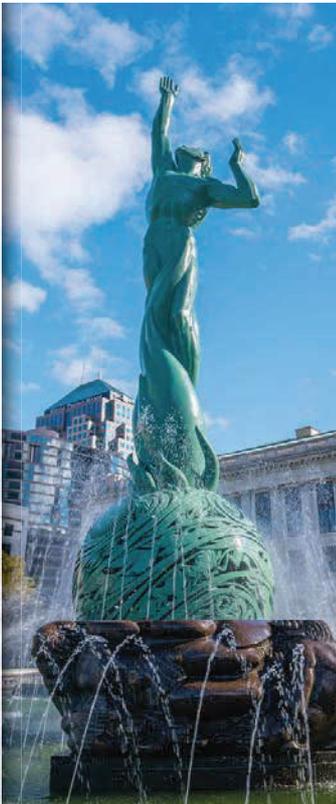
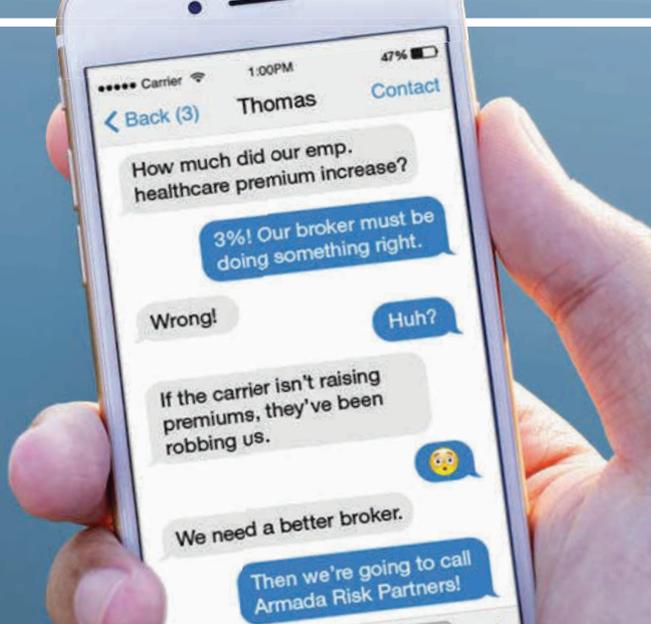
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