

LED maker among Welland's bright lights

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Eddie Chau

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WELLAND — The lights shine brightly down the lighting aisle at any Canadian Tire store.

Corner shelves are stocked full of Energizer brand A19 60-watt light bulbs containing products created in Niagara's Rose City.

While the bulbs bear the name of the American-based battery company, the product was actually the brainchild of Welland-based CRS Electronics, which created the LED (light-emitting diode) product.

And much like the battery company's motto, CRS hopes the bulbs will keep going and going and going — off store shelves and into Canadian homes.

"The bulbs are an investment," said CRS Electronics president and founder Scott Riesebosch. "They have a 20-year guarantee. These bulbs are efficient. I live it. I've seen my own power bill drop. It makes a huge difference. This isn't a cheap throw-away light solution. It will be the last light bulb you own."

The spotlight is efficiently shining bright on the company after Canadian Tire announced it would become the first major retailer in North America to carry the Energizer-branded line of LED products manufactured by CRS.

Starting this week the nationwide retailer will carry CRS' A19, MR16, GU10 and a number of PAR lights.

Not too shabby for a company that first manufactured a child-reminder system product in the mid 1990s.

Riesebosch started CRS in 1996 by developing its LED warning-light system to remind school bus drivers to check their vehicles for any remaining children before it was put in park for the day.

Riesebosch's mother, a school bus driver at the time, would often talk about still finding students in the bus after they were supposedly dropped off.

"There were stories about kids wandering off, getting bitten by dogs or found freezing," said Riesebosch, who utilized his engineering degree from McMaster University to create the product. "It's a warning system for drivers to check for the kids. We sold 100,000 units."

With the school bus market to focus on, CRS expanded its operations to create an LED warning system for vehicles to reduce illegal passing.

The company has since grown to be a leading LED manufacturer for more than 50 lighting companies across the world with its products appearing in everything from retail signage and home decor to aviation and emergency vehicles.

"I noticed very early on that LED lighting would be the next big thing," said Riesebosch. "They were in lighting rigs for fish tanks to outdoor signage and aircraft. You can do so much with the technology. It could replace general illumination products. We decided to focus on the LED bulb market. It was a huge transition for us."

CRS's chief operating officer, Alan Hussey said it was a huge transition into the LED bulb market, but one he believes will be successful. Hussey predicts the industry will see growth within the next year as consumers make the wise switch to energy-efficient light fixtures.

Currently the company employs 35 people. With growth comes the need to expand.

While Hussey sees the company expanding its operations, he said it will all be based in the Rose City.

"Welland is a good — if not better — location as any other in North America," Hussey said. "Our expectation is to grow in Welland.

"We may have to expand with satellite operations, but all the design, and initial manufacturing will still be done here."