

# Soule Train

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KALAMAZOO – W. Soule & Company joins several other companies in recently expanding at or locating to Midlink Business Park.

In February, the company leased 20,000 square feet to address its expanding fabrication operations. Recently, W. Soule upped the lease to 68,000 square feet.

The industrial contractor – specializing in industrial process piping, sheet metal fabrication, tank fabrication, millwright services, general construction and 24-hour HVAC/R maintenance and service – needed additional room because of growth in business from the renewable fuels industry.

"Midlink's robust facilities, state-of-the-art business park environment, competitive rental rates and tax-free Renaissance Zone status are major selling points for the business park," said Midlink President David Smith. "Our pro-business attitude allows us to be responsive to the market and our tenants' needs. This is W. Soule's second expansion at Midlink in under a year. We're thrilled to be a part of their growth."

The new division at Midlink will manufacture large boiler stacks, columns, towers and modular skid projects for its alternative energy customers.

Gary Cline, vice president and group manager for the sheet metal division of W. Soule, said the large boiler stacks are 10 feet in diameter and 125 feet tall. He said ethanol plants produce huge amounts of steam, and the boiler stacks produced by W. Soule hook up to ethanol plant steam boilers. The company has also performed piping work in ethanol plants.

According to Cline, continued growth of ethanol plants depends on the government's future actions. Still, he sees huge opportunities in wind and solar power. W. Soule has been making proper contacts in these sectors. Cline said the company is getting close to providing products and services for wind power.

"That could be a huge business for Michigan," he told *MiBiz*, adding that no one in the state currently manufactures the towers upon which the wind turbines sit.

In February, W. Soule added 20 workers at the new facility. In light of its additional square footage, Cline said the division will add more workers and top out at 50 employees. W. Soule has approximately 375 workers companywide. The division at Midlink will hire welders and fabricators, all of which will undergo an intensive training process and must be certified. It will also hire office personnel.

"We want to make sure it will be there when the wind blows," Cline said, referring to the importance of properly training individuals who will make the 125-foot-tall units.

W. Soule has been serving the energy industry for about four years.

"It's the one thing that seems to be booming around the country," Cline said.

Last year, W. Soule worked in 22 states and manufactured 16 stacks. All but one, he said, went out of state. According to Cline, one stack went to Marysville and another to Canada. W. Soule also worked on-site at two facilities in Indiana. Geographic diversification is important for the business, he added.

Proximity to the highway weighed heavily in W. Soule's decision to locate the division at Midlink. The boiler stacks are made in three sections and the biggest stack weighs 44,000 pounds.

"That's a big unit to get on the highway," Cline said.

Instead of "winding through streets," the company can get the stack on the highway in 10 minutes. Midlink also provided the right infrastructure needed – 38-foot-high ceilings, large bays and three high-capacity cranes.

"The folks at Midlink are very easy to work with," Cline said, noting their continued cooperation – even while moving from one end of the park to the other.

Additionally, Cline said Midlink provides the opportunity to get up and running in five to six weeks. Had W. Soule built a facility, Cline said it would have taken at least six months – and the price would have been "astronomical."

Besides alternative energies, W. Soule serves the food and beverage, life sciences, automotive, pulp and paper, specialty chemical and commercial industries. It has locations in Grand Rapids, Battle Creek and Orlando, Fla.

Should the need arise, Cline said the division at Midlink could definitely expand.

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