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Halloween lasts all year at Topstone Industries

Mel Goldberg heads Danbury's Topstone Industries, a major supplier of Halloween masks, costumes and other products.

Halloween is the second biggest party night of the year, after New Year's Eve, and Topstone Industries is taking full advantage. With a product catalog that would warm Stephen King's heart — company president Mel Goldberg admits "we make some really disgusting stuff" — Topstone is riding the crest of a Halloween mania that has swept the nation over the last five years.

Both Topstone's headquarters on Sand Pit Road in Danbury, and Goldberg believe the company's spooky business, and reflect more its international image. Nestled on a ten-acre, $4.2 million campus, business is conducted in a modern building with lots of glass and skylights surrounded by rolling green lawns and woods. Goldberg is a quiet, pleasant man who enjoys working with plants. He created the Japanese garden that graces the company's front entrance.
and a rocky display of foliage plants set off to the side. Inside, the reception area is quiet and comfortable, offices are spacious, and only a gallery of artistic movie posters — one depicts Dracula, another Boris Karloff — gives away the company's stock in trade.

Topstone provides one-stop shopping for the Halloween retailer. A customer can deck herself out from head to toe from Topstone's line. In addition to the disguises mentioned above, there are masks with feathers, sequins, and fake fur. There are false beards and mustaches. Wigs of every color and style are available. Pick from assorted body parts: ears, noses, tusks, hands, paws, feet, and tails. Even a witch isn't just a witch anymore. Not when she dresses herself out from head to toe from Topstone's line. A customer can deck herself out from head to toe from Topstone's line.

Moving into full costuming, the right selection of whimsical costumes is necessary. Sally Governale is vice president, special products. She not only designs products, advertising art and catalogs, but she also designed the company's headquarters building. She is a stickler for order and neatness. Without organization there would be disarray," he said as he toured the packing, sampling, and shipping area — all with thousands of boxes neatly stacked. The building features an elaborate sprinkler system and fire walls to minimize an accident at a later date, and not know what it is," he explained. "My feeling is, let's make toys that look like toys."
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When Danbury was still in the hat business, Topstone manufactured its own products. Even up until five years ago, most of the masks were made in this country. But Topstone has gone multi-national, and all products are imported from Taiwan, Korea, the Philippines, Mexico, China, Hong Kong, and Thailand. To do otherwise could price Topstone out of business.

"There is a lot of hard labor involved in our products," Goldberg said. "From a labor and environmental point of view, it is difficult to make them in this country.

Topstone's client list is also multi-national. Party shops, dime stores, seasonal merchandisers, and department stores in the U.S., Australia, South America, and Hong Kong carry Topstone's products. The company will sell to any merchant, large or small, and has no minimum order. Selling is divided among two sales teams. With a national sales office in New York City, one group acts as a sales management team and handles major accounts. The second group is made up of independent reps across the country.

Within the company itself are 35 full time employees, although that number will swell to 100 in the summer when Halloween items are being shipped. Four people, in addition to Goldberg, make up the management team: Steve Feldman, senior vice president; Sally Governale, vice president; Antone Petroni, controller; and Scott Fraistat, director of the art department; Al

Longtime staff member Kathleen O'Brien, right, reviews billing.

For his own part, Goldberg has worn all the hats at one time or another—from the loading dock to product development. These days, in addition to running the company, he sticks primarily to creating new products and indulges his favorite hobby by acting as in-house photographer.

Last summer he shot the 1989 catalog with a crew of local children modeling costumes. He also travels extensively on buying trips and shows every six weeks for a three-week trek, often to the Orient. The only job he resolves not to do anymore is selling. "I'm too attached to my product," he confessed.

But the sales team is doing a good job by itself, and Topstone needs to expand its 108,000-square-feet on Sand Pit Road (a separate warehouse in Danbury is 75,000-square-feet.) Goldberg thinks another 35,000-square-feet will hold them for five more years, but because of bureaucracy, the company can't immediately increase profits by moving the company to the West Coast, because that's where the products arrive from the Far East. "But I like to live here," he said, referring to his home in Fairfield. His wife is a "budding actress" in New York, and his children attend Eastern colleges. "We price our products as though we are on the West Coast, and we give up several hundred thousand dollars in profit that way," he explained because of the need to ship things East, and then ship them back to West Coast clients.

"But it's worth it," he said matter-of-factly. "We're successful enough."