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Light as air: Pat and Ryan Vandyk, owners of Harbor Foam in Grandville, carry blocks to a cutting station.

## Business springs from foam

**Tiny pellets are made  
into stuffing, packaging liners**

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GRANDVILLE — Polystyrene, best known as Styrofoam, does not weigh much. But a new family-owned business expects to create and shape 300,000 pounds in its first year.

Ryan VanDyk; his sister, Laura Kuperus; and their mother, Pat VanDyk, are partners in Harbor Foam, a Grandville company that transforms tiny pellets of polystyrene into the stiff foam products.

That product, called expanded polystyrene, is used for everything from insulation and the stuffing in stuffed animals to shock-absorbing

liners in packaging.

The Grandville City Council recently granted it a 12-year, 50-percent tax abatement on \$1.25 million in equipment purchases.

Located in leased space in 55,000 square feet of the former J.L. French metal fabrication plant, 2950 Prairie St. SW, Harbor Foam shapes and cuts polystyrene to a customer's specifications.

The threesome is hardly new to the business. Pat VanDyk's father, Floyd Johnson, founded Michigan Foam in Byron Center in 1962. She worked for 25 years there as her father's secretary. Kuperus and Ryan VanDyk also worked at the company for several years.

The company expects to see revenues of about \$3 million in its first year.

Ryan VanDyk said the process starts with synthetic pellets, about twice the size of a grain of salt. They

are poured into a tub that resembles a pressure cooker, and steam is forced up into the tub.

Because different uses call for different densities, VanDyk said, some customers want the pellets expanded as much as 40 times their original size. Other uses call for a denser product, achieved by limiting the expansion to about 13 times the pellets' original size.

After expansion, the pellets are pumped into a rectangular mold. More steam is added, and the pellets — pressed tightly together in the form — fuse together, forming a block 16 feet high, 4 feet wide, and 26 inches deep.

After the block is dried, it moves to a cutting table, where taut, heated wires slice through the blocks.

The company has three employees, and the partners expect that number to grow to as many as 15 in three years.