

New Haven Register

Bright idea: Lighting company rebrands itself, goes 'green'

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By Angela Carter, Register Staff

WEST HAVEN — Allison Schemitz Schieffelin will forever hear her dad's voice: "Innovate. Differentiate. Educate."

Her father, the late Sylvan R. "Sy" Shemitz, was a lighting designer who in 1977 founded Sylvan R. Shemitz Designs Inc., a company whose engineers created elliptipar, a line of asymmetric reflectors that can illuminate surfaces evenly — no matter how broad or tall — with few fixtures and low energy costs.

It also is known for its tambient division, a furniture-integrated product line that eliminates the need for overhead lighting in offices. Installations of the company's lighting may be seen at Grand Central Terminal, the White House, the JetBlue terminal at John F. Kennedy Airport, the Museum of Modern Art in Fort Worth, Texas, the Courtland S. Wilson public library in New Haven, Trumbull High School and the Yale Law School library.

"I inherited a culture where you don't cut corners, you make durable fixtures that won't end up in a landfill and you don't cheat. My father told me never to copy anyone," she said.

"He worked an incredible amount of hours to make this thing go. I want to sustain that legacy into the next generation."

After serving 14 years as a board member, Shemitz Schieffelin took over as chairwoman and chief executive officer in 2007 following her father's death and is rebranding the company with a new name, The Lighting Quotient, and custom lighting products that are environmentally-friendly, sustainable and cut costs for clients.

"The customer is demanding a more sustainable product," she said.



Joseph R. Zaharewicz, vice president of design at The Lighting Quotient, said the industry is moving toward using less mercury, lower product weights and manufacturing smaller bulbs and other light sources.

“By using a thinner fluorescent tube, we’re able to make fixtures with less aluminum,” Zaharewicz said. “One of the trends is to do greater things in smaller sizes. It frees you up to do more wonderful things with product design.”

The company itself is making efforts to reduce its carbon footprint with lighting installations that consume less energy and converting to what’s known as “lean” manufacturing.

“The end game is eliminating waste,” Shemitz Shieffelin said. “There’s a faster flow of goods. Not holding a ton of inventory that was never used is, in itself, sustainable and helps profitability. We’re not forced to sell things that have been sitting around for 10 years.”



David Okamoto, vice president of manufacturing, has been in charge of making workflow more efficient and eliminating waste. He also has made changes such as moving storage racks that blocked factory windows, allowing more natural light to penetrate the building.

“Every time I come into the factory, it’s different,” she said.

The Lighting Quotient’s Boston Post Road facility was built

between 1903 and 1911, with several additions. One of the structure’s early uses was housing a webbing factory. It was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1983.

The company employs 163 full-time workers and is a union shop, with representation by the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers. Products are designed and assembled on-site.

Shemitz Schieffelin said the recession has not forced layoffs. During the downturn, the company has added new products within its award-winning ambient line and created fixtures that withstand wet environments.

“We’re not using the ‘r’ word. It’s given us a much-needed innovation break,” she said.

Zaharewicz said company products are tested there prior to full-scale production, as well as bulbs or light bars that would be inserted into their fixtures. “We’ll see if the (suppliers’) claims seem true,” he said.

The Lighting Quotient recently was certified as a Women's Business Enterprise by the Women's Business Enterprise National Council, the nation's largest third-party certifier of businesses owned and operated by women in the United States.

Certified organizations pledge to follow WBENC business standards and the council provides best practice recommendations for female entrepreneurs and CEOs and supports supplier diversity programs.



"The economy has reinvigorated us with respect to not being willing to lose," Shemitz Schieffelin said. "I'm really optimistic we've got what it takes to get it done."