

BUSINESS REVIEW

Western Michigan

Everything Michigan Business |

Fleetwood grows, aims to retrieve off-shore mfg.

By Megan Lavell
br@mbusinessreview.com

At a time when it seems nobody is immune to the treacherous Michigan economy, **Fleetwood Group Inc.** of Holland says it is thriving.

Fleetwood Group designs and manufactures radio-frequency keypads used in k-12 schools, universities, conferences, corporate events and TV shows. The keypads allow the rapid gathering of data from a large group.

“That market continues,” said Don Beery, the director of new business development for Fleetwood Group’s electronics division. “It’s a fairly stable market.”

The Fleetwood Group is not only surviving in the current economy — it is growing, with the recent addition of a new-business-development unit. The new unit is designed to assist fellow U.S. manufacturers in repositioning their electronics production from offshore sources to domestic sources.

Fleetwood Group officials hope to go after markets in the



Fleetwood

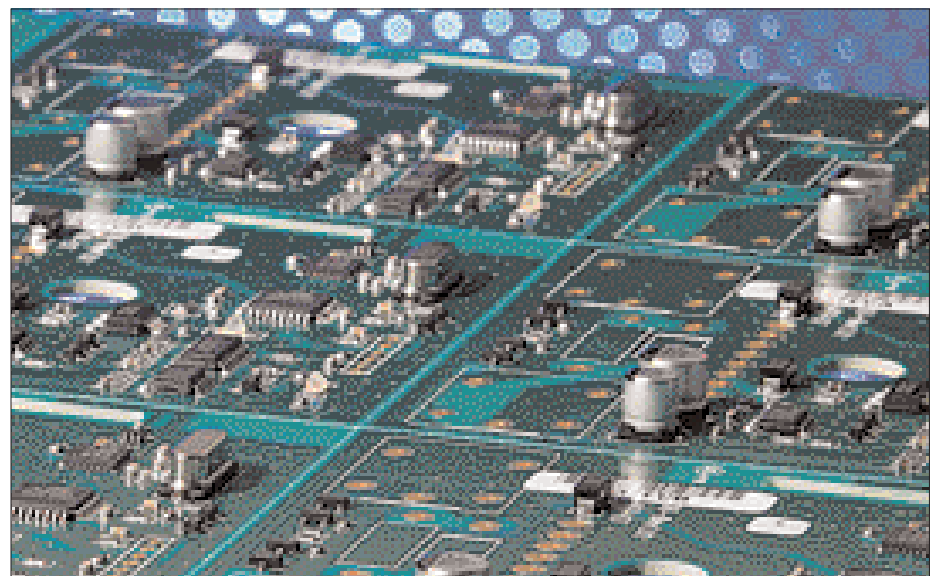
health care, homeland-security and alternative energy sectors. Beery said Fleetwood works with companies that already have relationships and connections in those three new areas of emphasis.

“Our core sweet spot is as development and manufacturing partner,” said Beery.

The addition of the new unit to the company includes the addition of new jobs. Fleetwood Group currently employs 165 people, with just under half of them in the electronics division. While he could not say for sure how many jobs will be added to the company for the production of more devices, Beery said he hopes to add a second shift to the production section. Beery himself is a recent new hire, added since the development of the new-business-development unit, as was that of an electronic engineer.

Fleetwood Group credits its success to its in-house research and development unit. Beery said most of the 11 members of Fleetwood Group’s R&D team are from Michigan. Some of that talent were people laid off from automotive companies.

“As a Michigan-based company, if we can help the region,



Fleetwood’s radio-frequency technology. | Photo courtesy Fleetwood

we’re certainly excited to do that,” he said.

It is no secret that American jobs have been making their way overseas for several years, but Beery said that is starting to change. The company won a \$23 million contract, which it bid on against several overseas companies, in late 2008.

“We won the bid against that kind of competitive company,” he said. “The shift seems to be turning back to the United States.”

More than three million hand-held devices have been produced in the United States, directly competing with Asian manufacturers of similar wire-

less units. Fleetwood Group’s annual sales of the devices have grown 20 percent in the last year, despite the economy.

If the company continues to grow, further expansion is a possibility in the future.

“We have the ability to expand the footprint on the site where we’re currently located,” he said.

Megan Lavell is a freelance writer in Holland.