

Monroe Manufacturer Repays 'Debt' to his Country

NC State University helps increase new sales by 15 percent with help of management system

On October 2, Phuong Nguyen, president and owner of Quality Electronic Manufacturing Services, Inc., (QEMS) added one more brick to the foundation of his American Dream.

QEMS accepted a banner signifying the company's accomplishment of ISO 9001 certification with assistance from the [North Carolina State University](#) Industrial Extension Service ([IES](#)). This is one of the many milestones that Nguyen has achieved in his lifetime; with his ultimate goal of repaying a debt he feels he owes to *his* country, the United States of America.

Nguyen, a native of Vietnam, became a refugee as he fled the war-torn

Communist regime with his father. He had been shuffled to a refugee camp in Malaysia, but since he had learned English, he was able to apply for an interpreter position with the United Nations.

Seventeen months as an interpreter made a profound impact on the then teenager. He said it opened his eyes to the importance of freedom. He knew he wanted to be in a free country and since his father had since become a U.S. Air Force officer, the choice was clear. When Phuong asked his father's advice, Nguyen senior said without hesitation, "The U.S. is the best."

American dream becomes reality



Phuong Nguyen believes quality in business drives success.



Team QEMS celebrates ISO 9001 certification, but quality manager, P.J. Marshall adds, "The certification may be new, but the emphasis on quality certainly isn't."

In 1982, Nguyen arrived in Charlotte and began a career with Siemens and became a U.S. citizen in '86. But when much of the operation was moved to Mexico, he decided to embark on yet another journey. He explored niche markets and with four employees, he and a partner started QEMS in 2002.

QEMS is a contract manufacturer that assembles printed circuit boards used in personal protection devices, telecommunications, industrial kitchen equipment and vehicle applications. They also produce solutions for computer and defense applications.

Spoken by a true advocate of continuous improvement, "This is just the beginning," said Nguyen as he addressed

his team of now 40 employees at the banner celebration. “Today is the beginning of our glory and I thank you for your commitment and your support. Today, we celebrate with lunch.”

He and his wife, Nancy, hosted a celebration for all their employees plus special guests Jim Carpenter, president of the Monroe Chamber of Commerce, and Nancy McCoy Duncan, director of business development; and Chris Plate executive director of the Monroe Economic Development Commission, as well as Sonya Hughes, Gene Beneduce and Kevin Grayson with NC State IES.

Nguyen formally thanked the [Centralina Workforce Development Board](#) for supporting QEMS through funding opportunities for the ISO 9001 project.



As an advanced manufacturer, QEMS use of technology is indicative of how manufacturing thrives in the 21st century.

ISO equals growth

Nguyen confirms ISO as a means for growth. He attributes a 15-20 percent increase in new business thanks to the certification which documents quality procedures and customer satisfaction. It’s also another realization toward becoming a world-class manufacturer.

QEMS’ diligence is paying off. They’ve won back contracts previously outsourced overseas and they place great importance on keeping all manufacturing in the U.S.

P.J. Marshall, quality manager, credits the company’s success in large part to the respect and exemplary leadership demonstrated by Nguyen. It’s also an organization that encourages contributions from everyone and the team concept is paramount to their success.

Systems Manager, Hannah Pham adds that their team approach is essential to keeping pace with the dynamics of contract manufacturing. “Our customers rely on us for our expertise and responsiveness to product and delivery changes. Team communication is key, and cross-training is provided at every opportunity and at all levels so that everyone is informed and involved with meeting needs of our customers,” she said.

Paid in full

When Nguyen came to this country, he made a promise to do whatever it took to return the goodwill. “This is not just a personal interest, I do it to pay back what I have gained,” said Nguyen.