Sunshine without light brightens Ceramicx business

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West Cork manufacturer Ceramicx has got 2018 off to a good start by opening an extension which has doubled the size of its facility to 44,000sq ft, and by picking up a Project Exemplar award from InterTradeIreland.

Located near Ballydehob, Ceramicx has established itself as a world leader in the niche area of infrared heating systems and components for industrial use.

"Our products are used in manufacturing throughout the world, principally in order to raise production efficiencies, reduce energy costs and reduce the carbon footprint of manufactured products," said company managing director and founder Frank Wilson.

Established in 1992, Ceramicx has customers in 65 countries, employs 65 staff and exports 98% of its production. The recent completion of a multi-million investment in the company involves 22,000sq ft of additional factory space, automation, new plant and machinery and equips it for further growth in global markets.

Ceramicx designs and makes infrared components and heaters, and also designs and supplies complete infrared heating systems worldwide. Its products have a wide range of applications including packaging, automotive and aerospace as well as electronics, construction and home heating.

InterTradeIreland's Margaret Hearty, with Fusion project exemplars company graduates Alan Moynagh from Statsports Technologies, Pavel Cirneala from CF Pharma, and Peter Marshall from Ceramicx.

Picture: Conor McCabe

The InterTradeIreland Project Exemplar award received this month was for the development of an innovative Vector oven used for heating composite materials for the automotive and aerospace industries.

It follows the winning of a Collaborative Research Award last year from Knowledge Transfer Ireland. This was for the 'herschel' an infrared energy mapping instrument for the measurement of previously invisible infrared energy fields, which according to Mr Wilson, is a world first .

Mr Wilson says infrared heat (a spectrum of radiant energy) which has been called "sunshine without light", has long been misunderstood and misapplied, says it has the potential to transform many corners of manufacturing worldwide.

"Infrared heat systems can be used to save time, energy and money in manufacturing cost – and moreover, are good for the environment," Mr Wilson said.

He says the USA and China are now the company's largest markets while Turkey, the UK and Germany are also significant and that the company has achieved annual average growth of 15% over the past eight years.

"We are now onto our fifth Innovation Partnership award with Enterprise Ireland. We continue to sponsor university research to increase the effectiveness and understanding of infrared heat systems," he said.

The company publishes its own specialist quarterly magazine called *Heatworks*.

A recent project involved upgrading production at international company Linpac Packaging.

"Our infrared retrofit system at the Linpac St Helens plant in the UK helped Linpac achieve a world-first reduction in the energy cost of expanded polystyrene packaging slashing the carbon foot print of the product and reducing the production energy cost by 40% ," said Mr Wilson.

In recent months Ceramicx has been innovating infrared heating for composite materials in the aerospace and automotive industries.

Customers and users in the aircraft and automotive and space include Aston Martin and Rolls Royce while other blue chip clients include Corning Glass, HP and GE. Plans for 2018 already include exhibiting at Chinaplas in Shanghai in April, making a series of videos popularising infrared heat science, and achieving continued growth in all markets.

The target for the year is a further 15% rise in turnover.