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Engineer in charge

In early March Genie, the leading aerial lift producer, announced that it was appointing Matt Fearon, an engineer, to head up its European operation. Cranes&Access visited Genie's European headquarters in Grantham to speak with him.

Genie Industries announced in mid March that following the departure of Jim Otley, it was appointing its vice president of Washington operations, Matt Fearon, to the post of managing director and vice president of Genie Europe, with responsibilities for all Genie activities in Europe, including Russia, the Middle East and Africa. Fearon is the first non-European in this role, Otley - who was British - took over in late 2005 from Frenchman Jaques Catinot - the first person to hold the position.

The appointment is more far reaching than just a new man at the top. Fearon will report directly to Genie president Tim Ford, whereas Otley reported to Steve Matuschak Genie's senior director international operations. The fact that Fearon's expertise and experience to date is all engineering and manufacturing related is no accident and follows

Ford's statement at the ARA that Genie is planning to step up its international operations, aiming to expand exports to more than 40 percent of its total revenues this year while manufacturing its products closer to the customer.

Fearon, who joined Genie over 12 years ago, is a mechanical engineer by education. He grew up in Ohio but his first job was in Connecticut with aero engine Pratt & Whitney where he was a manufacturing engineer. He then moved to Salt Lake City, joining Hercules Aerospace of Utah. "They were all products where if something broke the product blew up!" he quips. 12 years ago he was approached by Ron Barnhart who persuaded him to join Genie's design engineering team and move to the company's headquarters in Redmond near Seattle.

His first project at Genie was to develop the Z30/20N narrow aisle articulating boom lift. During his nine years in Genie's engineering group Fearon visited Europe relatively frequently in order to provide technical training and discuss design and regulatory issues with staff and customers.

Three years ago he was promoted to the post of vice president of operations for Genie's Washington region, effectively making him responsible for the manufacturing and engineering of most of Genie's aerial lifts. During this time he has been heavily involved with Genie's implementation of the Toyota Production System and continuous improvement.

This latest career development will give him general management and international exposure as he takes



responsibility for a \$600 million pan-European business. A business which while doing well faces a number of challenges. These include the incorporation of the Terex's Italian telehandler business into the Genie Europe fold; the production of the company's first aerial lifts outside of Washington state; and the opening of a second European production site to produce other Genie models including scissor lifts.

With so many exhibitions and events taking place over the next few months he says that he is not planning on relocating his wife and three children - two daughters and a son all 13 and under - until August. Fearon is tight lipped about where he will base himself, saying that given the geographic spread of the

European business there are a number of choices. The proximity of a decent airport will of course be one of the criteria.

In the meantime he says that he will spend his time visiting each of the company's locations and listening to what Genie Europe team members have to say and what they think needs to be improved or changed in order to help grow the business. When asked, he confirms that he has no sales and distribution experience, at least not yet and he is full of praise for the European sales and service team and suggests that they do not require close supervision.

"It helps that we have a very flat organisation structure and that people are entrusted to get on with the job and they usually know exactly what to do to get the best results," he says.

Fearon told Cranes&Access that Genie Europe is likely to undergo profound changes over the next few years as it moves from being a pure distribution and support operation to an international manufacturing, distribution and support business. "This involves a lot more than just building a few machines," he says. "The infrastructure that is required is quite different and includes everything from order processing to developing a supply chain with local suppliers which will then have an impact on the way the after-market parts business runs and so on. Our overall aim is to compress the time from the receipt of an order to delivery of the finished product."

"A major asset in going through such a transformation is that Genie people have a tremendous willingness to accept change, the 'that's how we've always done it' mindset simply does not exist here," he adds.

Production of the Z45 and 51 models of self propelled articulating booms begins shortly at the company's telehandler plant in Italy and Fearon confirms that further products will be soon be built in Europe. One option for scissor lift production is the Terex light equipment plant in Coventry. But he stresses that no decision has yet been taken.

When asked how long he was planning to remain in Europe he confirmed that the appointment is open ended but said that it will be for at least three years. "Anything less doesn't work," he said, "it can take a year just to settle in and then you need two years at the very least after that."

