Firstronic made Inc. magazine’s Private Titan list in this year. Announced in March, the Inc. Private Titan list is an exclusive roster of the 1,000 biggest and brightest American companies that have stayed private. The diverse list includes both long-term performers such as sheet music powerhouse Hal Leonard and winter sports maven Sport Obermeyer and fast-growing newcomers like delivery service DoorDash and A.I. startup C3 IoT.

“We are pleased to see our growth acknowledged once again by Inc. magazine. The hard work of our team is continuing to receive notice from the larger business community,” said John Sammut, President and CEO.

Firstronic’s Strong Systems Help Program Teams Do Extraordinary Things

While the COVID-19 pandemic impacted Firstronic production in April and part of May, its team has continued to support essential product production with amazing speed. At the beginning of the year, Firstronic’s team in Grand Rapids, MI set a new speed record in project launch, transitioning and completing all normal project validation activities in two weeks per product family on a project with 10 different product types totaling close to 375,000 units a month in production when an automotive customer ran out of capacity at its current supplier. In May, the team replicated this fast ramp for a second customer.

In this case, a medical device manufacturer with an infrared thermometer had production shut down in its Tijuana-based EMS supplier as a result of Baja California-mandated COVID-19 restrictions. They needed to dual source as quickly as possible since this was a critically needed product.

Firstronic had extra capacity available and was chosen as the alternate supplier. Its cross functional team (CFT) was able complete an 800-piece validation order in less than 10 days and begin full production in less than two weeks, thanks to Firstronic’s strong systems and supply chain management expertise.

In this project, materials were the critical path. Firstronic had a relationship with the printed circuit board (PCB) fabrication house and the customer redirected existing orders (Continued on page 3)
Firstronic Returns to the New Normal

Firstronic dropped to skeleton crews focused on only essential production and disease mitigation planning activities in both its Grand Rapids, MI and Juarez, Mexico facility from mid-April to mid-May, due to COVID-19-related shutdowns. In mid-May, the Company began the ramp back to full production in a new normal.

“Our goal was to restart facilities with a consistent strategy for protecting our team members and making sure everyone stays safe, healthy and confident about returning to work. We’ve taken a very robust approach to mitigation both to maintain workplace safety and ensure continuing compliance with public health guidelines that are continually evolving,” said John Sammut, Firstronic’s President and CEO.

Those practices included specific entrances and exits, daily temperature checks, defined social distancing spacing in production areas and cafeterias, reduced occupancy limits on public spaces and staggered breaks/shifts to accommodate that, required use of personal protective equipment (PPE), more frequent cleaning of common areas, and training on disease mitigation and the new workplace guidelines.

Facilities have been modified to include hand sanitizer stations at regular intervals, barriers in locations where social distancing wasn’t an option and automatic doors where possible. In Juarez, where bus transportation to work is provided, social distancing and sanitizing protocols start on the buses. Employees are temperature checked and utilize a hand washing station prior to entering the building. Employees who are found to be symptomatic wait in a temporary location outside the building before being redirected for medical care.

Only visitors deemed essential are allowed in either facility. All visitors must fill out a health screening questionnaire prior to admittance. Where possible, administrative personnel are encouraged to hold teleconferences or videoconferences at their desk. Conference rooms have reduced occupancy limits and tables are marked with social distancing seating requirements. Business travel must be approved on a case-by-case basis through November.

In Grand Rapids, an Employee Assistance Program is available 24/7 via a toll-free number to help handle any employee stress or mental health-related concerns and this program is (Continued on page 3)
Fast Ramp

(Continued from page 1)

for the PCB to ensure an immediate PCB supply was available. The printed circuit board assembly (PCBA) had four components including an IC, making the rest of the materials strategy fairly easy to manage.

The other key element was ensuring validation requirements were met. Firstronic’s NPI program is rigorous. The PCBA went through a complete purchased part approval process (PPAP), process failure mode effects and analysis (PFMEA), advanced product quality planning (APQP) techniques, development of a control plan and run-at-rate validation process. The CFT presented the initial ramp timeline to the OEM via a teleconference on May 12 and shipped 800 units for validation on May 22 utilizing this process.

Process validation was helped by the fact that OEM shared reflow profiles and the EMS provider was using the same solder paste. This speeded up the approval process.

“Between unanticipated spikes in demand and government-mandated shutdowns, the COVID-19 pandemic has created some extraordinary challenges for companies that are outsourcing. Firstronic’s systems and well-documented processes enable our teams to react nimbly in these situations,” said John Sammut, Firstronic’s President and CEO.

Firstronic’s business outlook continues to improve. June production levels returned to nearly 75 percent of plan.

“Our Q3 looks very strong. Much of our automotive business ties to electronics utilized in pickup trucks, which are in high demand. We also have had COVID-19-related demand increases in a medical product we build that monitors cardio and respiratory function. That combined with follow-on business from our fast ramp projects and additional new customers should help us achieve at or near plan numbers for 2020 and significant growth in 2021,” added John.

New Normal

open to employee family or household members. The program is part of covered health benefits and has no co-pay requirement. In Juarez, an infirmary and a nurse are available in-plant and employees have comprehensive medical coverage via Mexico’s social security program.

“We recognize COVID-19 mitigation needs to be part of our ongoing strategy for the next year. The protocols we’ve put in place are designed to minimize its spread within our team. Our customers depend on us and we appreciate the efforts our team is making to work within our new normal. We know it isn’t easy, but with the help of all team members we will get through this,” added John.

The Grand Rapids team saw COVID-19 related demand growth in this cardio and respiratory monitoring product.

The Grand Rapids team worked on essential products during the shutdown in Michigan.
Firstronic’s Charity Golf Scramble for CTF Postponed

Firstronic’s Sixth Annual Charity Golf Scramble for the Children’s Tumor Foundation has been postponed to Monday, Sept. 21 as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

“We moved the date of our Charity Golf Scramble to third quarter since our region is currently just starting to open back up. We are monitoring regional restrictions and advisories closely and will adjust further if need be. Please save this date and we will provide additional updates as we get closer,” said Wally Johnson, VP, Finance, Supply & IT.

The event will be held at Hawk Hollow Golf Course. At this time, sponsorships and foursome fee requests are on hold.

“We don’t want to collect fees for an event is still tentative. That said, should conditions in our area continue to improve, we will be reaching out in late July to confirm sponsorships and foursomes. Thanks in advance for your support and we look forward to working with you in support of this worthy charity,” said Wally.