

# CRAIN'S DETROIT BUSINESS

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## How Oakland County door maker learned to do more with less space

By [Dustin Walsh](#)



Photo by JOHN SOBCZAK Patricia Yulkowski, CEO of Total Door Systems LLC in Waterford Township, said a new, faster-drying coating process for fire doors allowed the company to move into a smaller building, yet produce more doors.

With the mass market for fire door systems controlled by international conglomerates, **Total Door Systems LLC** needed to adapt or shutter the family business.

Patricia Yulkowski, CEO and majority owner of Total Door Systems, said the Waterford Township-based company decided to concentrate on innovating new techniques to shrink square footage and increase capacity. Produce more with less — the mantra of the modern manufacturer.

Total Door sought to develop a new coating process that reduces drying time from as long as 24 hours to seconds, allowing the plant to move into a smaller space and operate at a higher capacity. Total Door manufactures the commercial doors found

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Four companies asked that question. Here's what they did:

- **Total Door Systems LLC:** A coating process that dries quicker allows the company to do more in less space ([this page](#))

- **The Acme Group, Great Lakes Filters division:** A new system for automotive

at hospitals, schools and office buildings.

Yulkowski spent more than two years in various meetings and laboratories of chemical makers seeking a solution, with no success.

But **Allied Photochemical Inc.** in Kimball Township near Port Huron was able to create the proprietary — and now exclusive to Total Door — coating.

"The largest paint suppliers said they couldn't do this, said it couldn't be done," Yulkowski said. But metro Detroit has "so many small and agile manufacturers, for whatever reason, that are able to break the boundaries on what can or can't be done," she said.

Total Door and its 50 employees moved into its 63,000-square-foot Waterford Township headquarters and plant in 2010, downsizing from a 175,000-square-foot plant in Pontiac.

The company built a new line, with much of the work done internally, for nearly \$1 million. The new coating process cut out the additional drying space needed under the traditional manufacturing process.

"The new capabilities take the restrictions off our growth capacity," Yulkowski said. "By reducing drying time, we can grow capacity by 200 percent to 350 percent than we're doing right now."

Total Door's quick-drying fire doors retail at an average of \$4,000 for an installed complete system. And the plant can make a door, start to finish, every three minutes, when it used to take more than a day, Yulkowski said.

Currently, only 50 percent of its products use the new coating, but Yulkowski expects all of Total Door's products will have the new coating by the end of 2014.

Last month, the **Michigan Manufacturing Technology Center** provided a tour of Total Door's plant to area executives, citing the company as a leader in manufacturing practices.

Nearly 98 percent of Total Door's components, including the coating, are sourced locally.

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