

Germany

## Steuler Invests in the Refractories Division to Increase Production Capacity

With effect from 1.1.2017, the Steuler Group acquired Westerwälder Thonindustrie (WTI) in Breitscheid/DE, a company that formerly belonged to PD-Refractories. The factory in the Oberwesterwald region, which employs 65 workers and has a total annual capacity of around 15 000 t, primarily manufactures specialist products for the steel industry, but also caters for other fields of application, such as the ceramics industry and special applications in the sector of stoves and fireplaces. The Breitscheid factory is run as a separate company under the name Steuler WTI GmbH.

Ulf Frohneberg (UF), Head of the Steuler-KCH Refractories Division, and Arne Pochert (AP), Chief Operations Officer at Steuler-KCH, have taken over as Managing Directors of the company renamed to Steuler WTI GmbH. They gave us some insights to the alignment of the new member of the Steuler Group to the Steuler-KCH Refractories Division.

**cfi:** *What was the motivation for the Steuler Group to acquire the WTI plant in Breitscheid from the PD Group?*

**AP:** While we have been thinking about building another tunnel kiln in Höhr-Grenzhausen for a long time because our capacities have been exhausted keeping up with the steep increase in our sales to the steel industry. With this acquisition, we have laid the foundation for further growth and underpinned our commitment to Germany as a production base.

**UF:** Steuler-KCH's refractories business has grown strongly in the last few years, especially in the segment for the steel industry. With the takeover of the plant in Breitscheid, we are also assuring supply for our growing customer base in the years to come. We still want to offer products from the premium segment.

Moreover, we are expanding our portfolio in refractories and therefore also our buyer markets. Beside their vast reputation as a supplier for the steel industry WTI is a well-known manufacturer of speciality products for lining furnaces and stoves. In addition, kiln furniture and kiln car bases in the heavy clay ceramics industry are produced. Especially for plastically shaped refractories, the company can draw on extensive know-how and many years of experience. With WTI we aren't just getting new customers in Germany, but in Europe, too.



**Fig. 1** Ulf Frohneberg (l.) and Arne Pochert

**cfi:** *Do production and sales have to be reorganized as a result of the takeover of WTI?*

**AP:** With the production site, the Steuler Group is gaining a strong, highly motivated team, who thanks to their expertise and



**Fig. 2** Plant Breitscheid – the new member in the “Steuler family”



**Fig. 3** Steuler WTI – ingot casting refractory systems

(Figs.: Steuler-KCH)

decades of experience are a bonus for the company. The aim is to keep all jobs in Breitscheid and naturally also at all other sites. The factory established in 1899 looks back on a similarly long company history and philosophy to Steuler's, which will simplify the integration process.

**UF:** All the products manufactured in Breitscheid will (just like the products manufac-

tured in our other plants) be sold through Steuler-KCH GmbH's existing, established sales network.

**cfi:** Are investments planned at the Breitscheid plant?

**AP:** With our existing know-how, we shall equip the products already manufactured at WTI for the steel industry with state-of-the-art production technology and upgrade them

to the quality standard we're known for. The new tunnel kiln enables us a continuous firing process in the high-temperature range. We aim for high production flexibility and want to ensure that the entire range of products can be manufactured in premium quality at both sites. Here the geographical proximity (<50 km) is a huge advantage. We also want to invest in the Breitscheid site.

Amongst other things, a total of two new dry presses are being installed in Breitscheid. The first of these – our own in-house design – is already in operation.

**cfi:** What can those customers who have so far bought direct from the plant in Breitscheid expect?

**UF:** At Steuler-KCH we combine the premium products with the many years of market access and our sales team's knowledge of the sector and round off the products and services offered with customized application technology, engineering and installation. For many years now, our customers have valued the integrated solutions they get from us as a single competent source.

**cfi:** Thank you for talking to us.

KS



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