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**CRAFT KIT TOOLS GO “CUTTING EDGE” WITH NEW TPE LOOK
AND FIND POPULARITY/PRACTICALITY GAINS AMONG USERS**

ERIE, PA – Consumer product manufacturers are continuously challenged to stand out from similar products in the marketplace while simultaneously achieving an advantage over the competition in a crowded and competitive sales environment. In order to give their products a new look, a fresh appeal and enhanced properties and functionality, many are turning to thermoplastic elastomers (TPEs) for answers.

Such is the case with Flexcut™ Tool Company of Erie, PA, a quality manufacturer of wood carving tools revered by hobbyists worldwide. In steps to give their product a better “grip” in the marketplace, they turned to leading overmold and soft touch TPE compounder GLS Corporation, Thermoplastic Elastomers Division, to achieve a new look to their popular line of craft kit tools. The results were immediate acceptance by users both old and new, and increased popularity in the product line, not to mention strong differentiation from other craft kit tool sets.

According to Flexcut’s molding firm, Erie Plastics and specifically Erie’s President Dusty Rhodes, “The switch from hand carved wooden handles to state-of-the-art soft touch plastics began with our design firm, K Development Corporation, a group of polymer industrial and consumer design specialists. The goal of the project was to design a new look for the product.

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We approached their Principal Jason Williams to help make our product a ‘cut above’ that of Flexcut’s competition.”

As luck would have it, Williams and K Development had several years of experience working with GLS Corporation of McHenry, IL on other successful non-Flexcut related projects. As the spokesman from the design firm explains, “We knew TPEs would provide the perfect answer to our challenges, and hoped GLS research and development could find us the ideal grade to replace and upgrade the current hand-carved wooden handles.”

The optimum base material for the handle, according to Rhodes at Erie Plastics, was determined to be ABS. But ABS isn’t the easiest substrate to overmold onto soft touch type materials. Compounding the problem was the need to include a special spring inside the handle, whose purpose is to hold the cutting blade. The solution was to mold one half of the handle, assemble the spring inside, and finally, before overmolding, weld the two halves together.”

But this didn’t resolve the overmolding process quandary. “We considered a variety of different compounders’ grades of TPE overmolding grades,” recalls spokesman at Erie Plastics, “and only GLS Corporation was able to achieve the right combination of colorability, processability, plus the rubbery, soft touch feel we wanted. We were also familiar with the Versollan™ OM 1262NX-1 grade for its ability to bond well to PC/ABS and polycarbonate, too. The material was selected and overmolded onto the welded two halves with no problem.” The TPE is shipped to Erie Plastics for them to add their own coloring.

Notes Dave Bennett, President of Flexcut Tool Co., “The new look – and user feel – became an immediate hit, both in appearance and functionality. It is great to know that tool design, which hasn’t really changed much since the industrial revolution, has been made possible with the use of these advanced materials and processes.” The major changes Flexcut brought to the market, in addition to new soft touch handles, is their multi-functional design which enables one tool, or series of tools, to take the place of a number of permanently bent conventional tools.”

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GLS Corporation has been a source for consumer product designers since their incorporation over two decades ago. Although the properties of TPEs are often intriguing to designers, it's the material's colorability and value-added features that designers and molders looking to impart to their products to drive buyer appeal. By supplying an eye-catching color, a pleasant texture, or creating an easily seen and felt difference from other products, GLS TPEs have been assisting consumer product manufacturers with a competitive advantage in their markets since 1979.

Erie Plastics is self-described as a small-to-medium sized custom injection molder of toys and outdoor products, electronics and specialty advertising items. Founded in 1986, the firm, with their fourteen 35 to 400 ton presses and own mold making capabilities, has managed to successfully offset the downturn of the economy and industry by providing quality products at competitive prices.

Flexcut products are found throughout the North American continent at leading woodworking supply dealers as well as through outlets internationally.

GLS Corporation has supplied elastomeric raw materials to the industry since 1979. The company has produced application-specific, custom TPE compounds since 1984. In the year 2001, the firm formed a strategic alliance with TPR manufacturer DSM. Later, in 2002, GLS entered into another alliance with GE Plastics to market a new line of Softfx™ hard engineering resin/soft TPE overmold combinations. Other GLS products offered for molding and extrusion include KRATON® thermoplastic rubber compounds; DYNAFLEX® thermoplastic elastomer compounds; VERSAFLEX® TPE alloys, VERSOLLAN™ Elastomer Alloys and new generation VERSALLOY® elastomer alloys, which exhibit enhanced performance properties. Applications for these materials are found in medical, sports and leisure, automotive, lawn and garden, appliance, kitchen tool, power tool, personal care and industrial markets, among others.

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For further information on the GLS Corporation line of Versollan overmolding grades, or for them to develop a grade specifically for a difficult application, contact: Marketing Department, GLS Corporation, 833 Ridgeview Drive, McHenry, IL 60050-7050. Telephone: (815) 385-8500 or (800) 457-8777. Fax: (815) 385-8533. E-mail: info@glscorp.com

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