



THINKSTOCK

Shades of gray for graphite firm

Higher oil prices are a double-edged sword for Superior Graphite Co., which enjoyed a 30% rise in sales last year and record profits even as crude oil, the raw material for the graphite it makes, rose in cost.

A big chunk of Superior's graphite, often added to castings and other iron products, is employed in drilling rigs. "So higher oil prices mean our raw material costs go up, but they also mean that there will be more drilling for new oil," says Edward Carney, Superior's CEO and the fourth generation of his

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family to lead the business.

The nation's largest graphite mine, in Ticonderoga, N.Y., which supplied generations of schoolchildren with pencils, is closed, and today most of the world's natural graphite is mined in China, Mexico and Canada. But natural graphite is being replaced by the material Superior produces from oil at its Southwest Side plant and at facilities in Kentucky and Arkansas.

One of the emerging applications is for storing and conducting power in the latest electric car motors. Graphite is considered ideal because it conducts electric currents easily while tolerating heat.

There is competition in this space, however, from graphite specialists in Germany, Japan and such U.S. rivals as GrafTech International Ltd. of Parma, Ohio. While Superior's sales jumped 30% to \$113 million last year, GrafTech's revenue soared 53% to \$1.01 billion.



Craig Shular, chairman and CEO of GrafTech, says steel-making, not batteries, will hold the key for graphite producers this year. "The steel industry has had some very difficult results the last couple of years, losing hundreds of millions of dollars each quarter," he says. "Our customers have been in tough shape through this downturn."

The steel industry is in recovery this year, and Mr. Shular and Mr. Carney expect rising volumes as a result. Graphite lines the walls of blast furnaces and is used to melt steel at mini-mills. "You basically can't melt steel without graphite," Mr. Carney says.

H. Lee Murphy

CRAIN'S LIST CHICAGO'S LARGEST PRIVATELY HELD COMPANIES

Crain's estimates are in gray. *Company-provided estimate.

Company/headquarters	Phone/website	Top executive	2010 revenue (millions); % change from 2009	Full-time local employees; worldwide	Type of business
220 NELSEN STEEL CO. L.P. Franklin Park	(847) 671-9700 www.nelsensteel.com	C. Davis Nelsen II Chairman, president, CEO	\$105.0 38.3%	77 80	Manufacturer of cold-finished bar steels
223 RADIO FLYER INC. Chicago	(773) 797-9105 www.radioflyer.com	Robert Pasin President, CEO	\$103.0 22.6%	65 123	Manufacturer of wagons, tricycles, scooters and other toys
224 ARTHUR J. ROGERS & CO. Elk Grove Village	(847) 297-2200 www.arthurjrogers.com	William G. Schmitz President, CEO	\$102.0 2.0%	40 40	Commercial real estate
224 LIBERTYVILLE CLASSIC GROUP Libertyville	(847) 367-1700 www.lincolnmercrys.com	Daniel H. Marks President, CEO	\$102.0 2.0%	50 50	Auto dealership
226 ILLINOIS AUTO ELECTRIC CO. Aurora	(630) 862-3300 www.illinoisautoelectric.com	H. Bruce Sirotek Chairman, CEO	\$100.0 -4.8%	166 247	Sales and distribution of transportation, industrial and outdoor care products
226 PEER FOODS INC. Chicago	(773) 927-1440 www.peerfoods.com	Larry O'Connell President	\$100.0 NC	12 180	Processor of meats for the food-service industry
226 WOZNIAK INDUSTRIES INC. Oakbrook Terrace	(630) 954-3400 www.wozniakindustries.com	Michael R. Wozniak President	\$100.0 11.1%	110 240	Manufacturer of forged, stamped, fabricated and machined metal components
229 MARKETING WERKS INC. Chicago	(312) 228-0800 www.marketingwerks.com	Julie Guida, Scott Moller Managing partners	\$99.2 33.1%	152 170	Advertising and marketing
230  BRIGHTSTAR GROUP HOLDINGS INC.; Gurnee	(847) 782-8282 www.brightstarcare.com	Shelly Sun CEO	\$99.1 91.6%	80 98	Home health care staffing
231 ARROWSTREAM INC. Chicago	(312) 267-4400 www.arrowstream.com	Steven LaVoie Chairman, CEO	\$97.9 NC	97 100	Logistics and supply-chain management technology and services
232 SENTINEL TECHNOLOGIES Downers Grove	(630) 769-4300 www.sentinel.com	Dennis Hoelzer President, CEO	\$97.4 21.5%	227 302	Technology design, development, support and integration
233  TRANSPORTATION SOLUTIONS GROUP LLC; Chicago	(312) 738-5500 www.tsgsolutions.com	Todd Berger President, CEO	\$97.0 47.0%	124 141	Third-party logistics
234 TREASURE ISLAND FOODS INC. Chicago	(773) 327-4265 www.tifoods.com	Maria Kamberos President, CEO	\$96.8 -0.2%	560 560	Retail grocery chain
235 ROYAL BUYING GROUP INC. Lisle	(630) 353-7950 www.royalbuying.com	Michael E. Zielinski President, CEO	\$96.8 0.8%	36 36	Negotiates vendor programs for member gas stations; provides sales, marketing and fulfillment services for stored value products
236 CURRAN CONTRACTING CO. Crystal Lake	(815) 455-5100 www.currancontracting.com	James "Rick" Noe President	\$96.0 -2.0%	290 290	Asphalt paver and road builder
236 MICRODYNAMICS GROUP Naperville	(630) 527-8400 www.microdgm.com	Thomas F. Harter Sr. Chairman, president, CEO	\$96.0 17.2%	170 200	Billing and statement processing, mailing and electronic presentation
236 WILLIAM A. RANDOLPH INC. ² Gurnee	(847) 856-0123 www.warandolph.com	Anthony Riccardi Sr. President	\$96.0 -5.0%	50 50	Construction, general contractor
239 COMPACT INDUSTRIES INC. St. Charles	(630) 513-9600 www.compactind.com	Dale Veronica Brown Vice-chairman, CEO	\$95.0 5.6%	103 103	Contract manufacturer and co-packer of dry foods
239 INTERIOR INVESTMENTS LLC Lincolnshire	(847) 325-1000 www.interiorinvestments.com	Michael Greenberg, Donald Shannon, co-principals	\$95.0 -9.5%	95 135	Contract office furniture dealer
241 MERISANT WORLDWIDE INC. Chicago	(312) 840-6000 www.merisant.com	Paul R. Block Chairman, president, CEO	\$94.1 0.2%	64 425	Maker of artificial sweeteners
242 BAIRD & WARNER INC. Chicago	(312) 368-1855 www.bairdwarner.com	Stephen W. Baird President, CEO	\$92.0 NC	176 176	Real estate brokerage; mortgage, title and home services
242 CHICAGO HEIGHTS STEEL ¹¹ Chicago Heights	(708) 756-5619 www.chs.com	Bradley Corral President	\$92.0 1.1%	250 250	Steel manufacturer
242 GEORGE S. MAY INTERNATIONAL CO.; Park Ridge	(847) 825-8806 www.georgesmay.com	Kerry C. Jacobs President	\$92.0 2.2%	410 880	Management consulting
242 TCA HOLDINGS LLC Chicago	(773) 463-1234 www.tcaholdings.com	Steven L. Schwartz President, CEO	\$92.0 2.2%	1,200 2,500	Owner and manager of tennis and fitness clubs
246 FOUR SEASONS HEATING & AIR CONDITIONING INC.; Bedford Park	(773) 577-2709 www.fourseasons-chicago.com	David Musial CEO	\$90.9 16.2%	640 640	Residential heating and air conditioning contractor
246 WISS JANNEY ELSTNER ASSOCIATES INC.; Northbrook	(847) 272-7400 www.wje.com	William J. Nugent President, senior principal	\$90.9 -0.4%	178 456	Architecture, engineering, materials science
248 L&D GROUP INC. Montgomery	(630) 892-8941 www.lyonworkspace.com	R. Peter Washington Chairman, CEO	\$90.0 5.9%	101 550	Manufacturer and distributor of workplace equipment
249 BELGRAVIA GROUP LTD. Chicago	(312) 751-2777 www.belgraviagroup.com	Alan D. Lev President, CEO	\$89.3 -0.7%	24 24	Homebuilder, mortgages, sales
250  OTTO ENGINEERING INC. Carpentersville	(847) 428-7171 www.ottoexcellence.com	Thomas J. Roeser President	\$89.1 25.5%	511 511	Manufactures audio accessories for two-way radios and controls for electrical switching
251 EVANS FOOD GROUP LTD. Chicago	(773) 254-7400 www.evansfood.com	Alejandro Silva Chairman	\$89.0 1.5%	80 225	Snack-food manufacturer
252 HINDA INC. ¹⁰ Chicago	(773) 890-5900 www.hinda.com	Michael Arkes President, CEO	\$88.4 -9.3%	93 103	Developer and manager of incentive programs
253  GARY LANG AUTO GROUP McHenry	(815) 385-2100 www.garylangauto.com	Gary Lang President	\$88.0 25.7%	90 90	Automotive dealership
253 HOLLY HUNT ENTERPRISES INC. Chicago	(312) 329-5999 www.hollyhunt.com	Holly A. Hunt CEO	\$88.0 -2.2%	135 195	Designer, manufacturer and distributor of interior furnishings
255 FLORSTAR SALES INC. ¹ Romeoville	(815) 836-2800 www.florstar.com	F. Wade Cassidy CEO	\$87.0 NC	95 138	Wholesale distributor of floor coverings; provider of logistical services
256  MNJ TECHNOLOGIES DIRECT INC.; Buffalo Grove	(847) 634-0700 www.mnjtech.com	Susan Kozak President	\$86.3 40.2%	72 78	Computer hardware and software reseller
257 WALTER E. SMITHE FURNITURE INC. Itasca	(630) 285-8000 www.smithe.com	Walter E. Smithe III President	\$85.7 0.5%	430 430	Furniture retailer