

# Burlington County Times

## Meet the South Jersey firm that keeps COVID vaccines safe, usable

**Jarrad Daniel Saffren** Burlington County Times  
February 16, 2021

VINELAND — The factory at 563 Crystal Avenue has been manufacturing glass for more than 120 years.



Today, it employs hundreds of people, with the vast majority living in Vineland, according to David Lucht, the regional manager for the site's current occupant, Corning Pharmaceutical Glass.

And now, the old city factory and the hard-working residents are making a vital contribution to the national effort to vaccinate Americans from COVID-19.

Corning is making the glass tubes used to store millions of COVID vaccine doses across the country.

In 2017, the company launched valor glass tubing, the first new glass composition in almost 100 years, according to Lucht, quickly becoming the industry standard.

Last June, as part of Operation Warp Speed, the U.S. government gave Corning \$204 million to rapidly increase the amount of vials it was producing, with the goal of using them to store vaccine doses. With its robust exterior, valor glass is ideal for storing drugs in extremely cold temperatures for extended periods.

"A lot of the vaccines need to be stored in cold storage," explained Lucht.

In particular, the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines — the two COVID-19 vaccines currently in use in the U.S. — need to be kept at minus 70 degrees Celsius and 40 degrees Celsius, respectively.

Between June 2020 and January 2021, Corning quadrupled manufacturing capacity, according to Lucht. In the last three months of 2020 alone, the company made enough valor glass vials to support 100 million vaccine doses.

The entire process starts in Vineland, which is where Corning manufactures the tubes for its U.S.-based glass products. The company then ships the tubes up to its Big Flats, New York factory to convert them into vials for drug storage.

After that, Corning collaborates with the federal government in sending the vials to governments and vaccination sites across the country.

"The Vineland plant is proud of its contribution," Lucht said. "Without that facility, we couldn't contribute to the distribution of the vaccine."

Lucht has lived in Vineland for three years now.

In January, he visited his doctor's office twice in a span of a few weeks. While making small talk, he told several office employees what he does for a living, and what his factory does.

He said they were all surprised to learn that their city was playing a critical role in the fight against COVID. "I think they should be proud," Lucht added.

Dave Watson, Corning's director of finance, has lived in Vineland since 1996. He started working at the glass factory in 2003, 13 years before Corning bought the property.

Watson said he was proud to tell his 12-year-old son what the facility was doing to fight COVID.

According to Lou DeCicco, the plant's operations manager, when the company gave out "Our glass SAVES LIVES" T-shirts, several employees started wearing them to work. They also began asking for more.

"What we do matters," DeCicco said.

It is also helping to boost Vineland's image.

Sandy Forosisky, the city's economic development director, said outsiders are seeing the positive. Last summer, after receiving the Operation Warp Speed money, Corning officials touted the city's role in the fight against COVID in a news release.

"It shows that Vineland has some pretty significant industries here," Forosisky said. "We're proud."

*A local news and sports reporter around Pennsylvania and New Jersey since 2015, Jarrad Daniel Saffren joined The Burlington County Times' award-winning local news team in October 2019, adding business, education and town government features to the coverage. Contact him at jsaffren@gannett.com and follow him on Twitter @JarradSaff. Please help support local journalism with a subscription to The Burlington County Times.*