

SPRING 2010

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Gardner Denver emphasizes continuous improvement to better serve customers. *page 38*



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GOING FORE-WARD

Club Car is expanding outside of the golf course. *page 48*

CLEAR-CUT STRATEGY

Inteplast Group could be a model for how future manufacturers can grow in the United States. *page 80*

KEEP ON COUNTING

WILLBANKS METALS CONTINUES TO DIVERSIFY AS IT CELEBRATES MORE THAN 35 YEARS IN THE BUSINESS. **BY FERNIE TIFLIS**

WILLBANKS METALS HAS BEEN PRODUCING HOT-ROLLED STEEL AND OFFERS VALUE-ADDED SERVICES FOR MORE THAN 35 YEARS.



For most companies, having a variety of services is the key to surviving market challenges. However, Willbanks Metals Inc. takes diversity to a whole new level. The Forth Worth, Texas-based firm primarily distributes hot-rolled steel and offers value-added services that include laser cutting, plasma cutting, plate and angle rolling, forming, shearing, punching/drilling, oxy-fuel cutting and sawing. Over 35 years, Willbanks Metals has established itself as one of the

most diverse steel distributors in the southern United States.

John Willbanks and Fred Letz founded Willbanks Metals in 1974. The two had a modest start, making trailer parts for transportation manufacturers and structural fabricators in their small fabrication shop in Fort Worth. After the company acquired a cut-to-length processing line that could flatten steel coil to a specific length, it became large enough to buy its own coil from the

steel mills to process in-house. By 1978, Willbanks Metals was large enough to distribute flat sheet and plate, and offer a broad range of products to its clients. Today, the company boasts a fleet of equipment and it upgrades or acquires new equipment almost annually to continuously find value for its clients.

In fact, in 2009, Willbanks Metals acquired its second cut-to-length line coil processor. The machine, which will be in operational in May, will allow >>



More than ever, our thoughts turn gratefully to our customers who have made our progress possible in spite of the challenges associated with a downward economy. And it is in this spirit that we say, simply but sincerely

Thank You

And for the sake of all of us, we will hope for the **spark** that is needed to boost all our business!

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Congratulations Willbanks Metals

» the company to enter other markets. “It is going to widen the range of our products, which allow us to penetrate new industries such as tractors and

“BECAUSE WE DEAL WITH SO MANY INDUSTRIES ... WE LIKE TO REMAIN FOCUSED ON KEEPING A GOOD, EVEN KEEL THROUGHOUT [THE MARKET’S] UPS AND DOWNS, AND WE THINK DIVERSITY HAS BEEN THE KEY TO THAT.” -Ryan Letz

farm equipment, wind power, mining, tubing, wastewater and water treatment, and utility poles,” Vice President of Sales Ryan Letz says.

ADDED BENEFIT

Willbanks Metals’ current cut-to-length machine is 30 years old, capable of

handling coils up to 60,000 pounds, approximately 97 inches wide and a gauge range of 16 inches to half an inch. And although the machine is still in good shape, it does have a disadvantage.

“It does not allow us to process higher grades of steel,” Letz notes. “A bigger machine will allow us [to handle] half-inch by 96-inch wide coil that is up to grade 80. We will also be able to do grade-100 material up to half-inch thick by 72-inch wide. So, it will allow us to go from a lighter grade of steel to heavier and harder grade.”

The new machine will enable Willbanks Metals to plasma-cut, oxy-cut, drill, bevel, counter sink, tap and counter bore all in one step.

“This machine offers the most efficient way of completing parts that need multiple processes,” the company says.

Letz explains how the company came across this innovation. “We read an article in a magazine high-

lighting this machine,” he states. “Before us, only one other company had it. What it does is it literally pulls the material long-wise, changing the physical properties of the steel after we process it.”

The majority of Willbanks Metals’ customers apply heat to steel to make different products, Letz adds.

“The benefit of this machine is when a material is burned, the heat doesn’t make it move – it doesn’t coil or spring back,” Letz explains. “It takes memory out of the steel, and the end-product is to have a flatter steel product.”

GOING STRONG

Willbanks Metals considers itself fortunate. As much of its competition is losing money month after month or going out of business, the company is still going strong. “We are currently focused on how to take advantage of this sluggish economy,” Letz notes.



HOUSEHOLD NAME

In 1974, Willbanks Metals was established with one goal in mind: to put its customers first. And for more than 35 years, its reputation in the market remains unmatched, the company says. "Being in business for this long says something about how we treat our employees, customers and vendors," Ryan Letz asserts.

"Even some people who we have not done business with in the past know our name. It is always a bit easier to walk into a new client's office and try to sell them our products when our company already has a good reputation in the market."

Staying diverse helps the company adapt. "The more we diversify, the less impact we feel in a down economy," Letz asserts. "Our capabilities with buying the new cut-to-length line puts us in new markets, which

will let us hire new salespeople to handle our new accounts."

In addition, Willbanks Metals targets a wide range of markets. "Because we deal with so many industries, one industry may be really hot and the other may be cold," Letz notes. "We like to remain focused on keeping a good, even keel throughout those ups and downs, and we think diversity has been the key to that."

Fortunately, its location in Texas gives the firm plenty of work. "We are focusing on energy – from natural gas to oil and wind," Letz states. "The energy sector is still doing OK, especially in Texas. Some markets may have been slow in comparison to 2008, but there is more optimism in the air than there has been in the past eight to nine months."

In addition, Letz notes that al-

though the commercial and transportation industries are still slow, the company is seeing many government-funded projects, such as highways and new bridges.

AN EVEN BETTER SERVICE

With more than 2,000 different products manufactured in one location, Willbanks Metals is looking into diversifying into more products by opening up a trading division.

"We are going to be focused on stocking higher grades of mill plate in other locations in the western part of the United States," Letz says. "This will allow us to take advantage of even more markets that we are not currently servicing."

Willbanks Metals says its ultimate goal is to remain flexible and diverse to better compete in the market. **mt**



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