

Whitney



Fifth wheel angles are cut out efficiently on the 3400 XP.



WHITNEY PUNCH/PLASMA—3400 XP APPLICATION

Patrick Enterprises Saves Time With 3400 XP

Pembroke, Virginia, a small community nestled in the Blue Ridge Mountains in the southwest part of the state, is not where you would expect to find a world class supplier of fabricated and machined parts and weldments, but Patrick Enterprises Corporation is well on its way to becoming just that.

Founded in 1984 by Paul B. Collins, Patrick Enterprises began in a small garage in Patrick County, VA, well south of its current location. At that time, there were only four employees and work mainly consisted of supplying carts and maintenance parts for the regional textile and furniture manufacturers. Not that Collins was a stranger to big-time manufacturing. In fact, he was the vice president of manufacturing for a mining equipment manufacturer in Pembroke, with responsibility for several facilities. Eventually, that company shut down the Pembroke facility, and Collins left to work with a family friend who had a machine shop. Quickly, Collins realized a need for a fabricating shop in the area, and he started a new business in a 40' x 100' service garage. Eventually, Collins' former employer left the Pembroke facility vacant, and Collins took the risk of purchasing the 50,000 square foot facility for Patrick Enterprises.

Today, Patrick Enterprises Corporation in run by Mark Collins, the second of three sons, there are 42 employees including Mark's wife Teresa (controller and human resources), and brothers Dwight (materials/purchasing) and Ken (quality assurance). Patrick now has a full complement of fabricating, welding and machining equipment that processes material from 28 gauge (0.015") to 6" thick plate, and machined weldments up to 20,000 lbs. Processes include laser cutting, plasma cutting, oxyfuel, shears, CNC punching, press brakes, welding, and painting. In addition, unlike many other metal fabricators, Patrick has a large complement of machining equipment including CNC mills, lathes, and boring mills. In 1999, a 10,000 square foot addition was built, bringing the facil-

ity size to 60,000 square feet. Patrick's customers include major players in the heavy truck and construction equipment industries, and they compete against both regional metal fabricators, and global fabricators from countries like Mexico and India.

At a time where the term "outsourcing" has taken on new meaning (as in "global outsourcing"), Patrick has actually strengthened its position and penetration within its existing customer base. Mark Collins attributes Patrick's success to a high level of customer service. For example, some of its work is high profile, high priority work where another supplier is unable to ship fabricated parts in time. Patrick receives orders today that need to ship tomorrow morning, or line stoppages may occur. This premium service brought Patrick's name to the forefront within its customers' purchasing organizations, and earned Patrick the opportunity to compete for higher volume contract work.



Ray Martin and Jamie Lucas review a stack of fifth wheel angles produced on the 3400 XP.



Owner Mark Collins attributes Patrick's success to a high level of customer service.

For the last several years, Patrick has been contracted to produce fifth wheel angles for the heavy truck industry. These hole-intensive parts are made from 5/16" thick high strength steel, and are the mounting surfaces for the fifth wheel assembly at the rear of a heavy truck. In order to fabricate these parts, Patrick took steel plate, sheared it to size (in two directions), punched the sheared blanks on a CNC press, and deburred the sheared edge and punched holes.

Up against both capacity constraints and cost pressure, Patrick set out to purchase additional equipment for the manufacture of the fifth wheel angles in 2004. In March of 2004, they took delivery of a Whitney 3400 XP punch/plasma machine, and they hit the ground running. The 3400 XP now produces fifth wheel angles at a rate of one to two minutes apiece. This represents a savings of 4-1/2 to 5 minutes for each part. Even the deburring operation has been eliminated as they have found

that there is no need to deburr either the punched holes or the RAMPAGE! plasma cut edge as produced on the 3400 XP. This time savings translated to an annual savings of approximately \$200,000 on fifth wheel angles alone. Additional parts such as fifth wheel ramps and cross-members yield additional savings. For example, the 3400 XP produces cross-members in one-half the time of Patrick's production laser, located across the aisle from the 3400 XP.

The 3400 XP could not have been purchased at a better time. Like all contract shops, Patrick is constantly under cost pressure from its customers. Steel prices have increased almost two-fold, and the forecast for fifth wheel angles calls for a 40 percent increase over previous levels.

"It used to be that service and quality were most important to our customers" states Mark Collins. "Today, quality is a given, and everyone seems to be putting pricing first. Right now, we would be in major trouble if we didn't have the 3400 XP. If I knew then what I know now, I would have bought two machines. For plate fabrication, I don't see another machine that competes."

Patrick has quickly adapted to its new machine. Instead of just punching holes and contouring the parts complete, Patrick, with the help of Whitney's application services, developed a process to use common line cutting. This both improved material utilization and reduced cutting time. Mark has also embraced Whitney's online ordering system for punches and dies. "It's easy. I don't have to worry about calling people and leaving messages. I just do it and it's done." Next on his agenda is trying TuffSkin™ tooling.

After three months in production, two employees are trained to run the 3400 XP, and two additional employees are being trained. This is part of Mark Collins' philosophy that his employees



Operator Jamie Lucas oversees operation of the Whitney 3400 XP.

Patrick Enterprises offers both fabrication and machining services. Here, a long weldment is machined by Jeff Westbrook.



need to be cross-trained on many processes. For example, 3400 XP Operator Jamie Lucas has been with the company for 10 years, and is able to run all CNC punch presses and shears, as well as spray painting. Press Brake Operator Jason Cook can run almost every piece of equipment in the fabrication and weld shops after eight years with the company. "It is impossible to find trained fabricators," says Collins. "For that reason, we take welders and machinists who are willing to be cross-trained."

In addition to training, Mark has taken advantage of other opportunities as well. The State of Virginia offers a program for reviewing safety programs proactively to determine compliance to OSHA (called OSHA SHARP—Safety and Health Achievement Recognition Program). A large banner in the lobby proudly boasts Patrick's compliance, indicating that Patrick Enterprises is a safe workplace.

After several years at the helm (Mark phased in to replace his retiring father in the late nineties), Mark now sees the realities of running a fabrication shop run deeper than just making parts. His three biggest concerns today?

1. Difficulties in sourcing material. Patrick has found that they need to hedge their bets by stocking at higher inventory levels today in order to meet their quick delivery requirements.
2. Rising cost of employee benefits. Benefits, most notably health insurance, are rising dramatically. This makes it

difficult for a small business to compete against larger corporations for the same labor pool. He finds that employees are more interested in benefits than wages today. This past year, even though health care insurance premiums rose substantially, Patrick actually reduced the employee's share of the premiums.

3. Growth under control. Mark feels that he could double his business today—the work is there. But growing too fast is risky. Mark's goal is to grow his business a modest 30 percent this year, and to double his sales within five years.



Jason Cook bends the fifth wheel angles into their final form.

Quality Shop, Unmatched Customer Service, Cost Competitive, Safe Workplace, Global Competitor, World Class Manufacturing, Patrick Enterprises. ♦