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Family follows Trusty path

Local manufacturer uses lessons from innovative founder

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Trusty-Cook Inc. looks like an old-school manufacturer, even though its inventions are cutting-edge.

The company's 15,000-square-foot factory on 59th Street east of Fort Harrison State Park looks more like an inventor's workshop than a state-of-the-art operation intent on pounding out millions of widgets.

Trusty-Cook owners eschew hot trends like Japanese-imported lean manufacturing, and aren't apt to use catch phrases like "just-in-time delivery."

Despite the company's throw-back demeanor, when it comes to working with urethane, Trusty-Cook is revolutionary.

And its latest invention could become its biggest moneymaker, even bigger than the dead blow hammers made famous by Trusty-Cook founder Jon C. Trusty Sr. and sold under some of the industry's biggest names, including Matco Tools and Snap-On Tools.

The company's newest product—a urethane spindle liner—is gaining a following in manufacturing plants and machine



Joel Trusty of Trusty-Cook works on spindle liners in the Lawrence shop.

shops throughout North America, said Jill Sevelow, managing editor of *Today's Machining World*. Trusty-Cook's spindle liners allow automated tool- and part-making machines to work faster, more quietly and with greater precision than standard steel liners, Sevelow said.

Fueled by its growing spindle liner business, Trusty-Cook increased its overall sales 45 percent, to \$2.5 million, in its most recent fiscal year ended May 31. If the spindle liners continue to gain

traction, Trusty-Cook's revenue could easily double in the next few years, industry experts said.

In most metalworking machines, steel—called bar stock—is fed through a hollow spindle that holds and spins the steel while it's being cut to specification. The bar stock often has a much smaller diameter than the spindle, and a different shape than the round spindle opening.

Until Trusty-Cook's liner hit the market in 2000, the answer

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to this problem was a steel liner that used mounted interior screws to limit the bar stock's movement.

But Trusty-Cook's urethane liners fit snugly through the spindle, and have a custom opening for the uniquely shaped bar stock. The tight fit allows the spindle to spin at maximum speed with little movement of the bar stock.

"What Trusty-Cook is doing is a major leap forward," Sevelow said. "They're the only ones I know making these type of spindle liners in North America. These products are a big hit in the machining and manufacturing industry. Trusty-Cook has a strong reputation nationally and, with this, it's only getting stronger."

Family ties

Trusty-Cook's factory is a patchwork of work stations, often shrouded in the sound of rock music blaring through a well-worn stereo. But the skill sets of Trusty-Cook's primary players fit together almost seamlessly, clients and industry sources said.

"When I deal with Trusty-Cook, my customer satisfaction is 100 percent," said Jim Shelton, who has operated Shelton Machinery Inc. in Fishers since 1988. "No matter what the challenge, they simply respond, and much quicker than most other suppliers."

Before he died suddenly three years ago, Jon Trusty passed along the art of working with urethane to his three sons: Joel, Jerry and Jon Jr. "Buddy". Jerry, 46, and Buddy, 48, are Purdue University engineering graduates. Joel, 43, has a business degree from Indiana University. All are hands-on, spending far more time on the factory floor than behind a desk.

At Trusty-Cook, blood is the only thing that runs thicker than urethane. The founder's daughter, Julie, 40, is office

manager, and her husband, Jeffrey Nawrot, is vice president of business development. Joel Trusty credits Nawrot's marketing savvy and organizational skill for much of the company's recent sales growth.

Clients credit the four Trusty siblings—the company's co-owners—for keeping the founder's innovative spirit alive.

"I've been in this business a long time, and I've seen lots of innovations, but this [spindle liner] is one of the best I've seen," Shelton said. "The potential for this is way out there."

To the untrained eye, urethane looks like nothing more than thick plastic. But Jon Trusty discovered the material doesn't tear, cut or puncture and in many applications is as tough as steel. His dead blow hammers made of urethane don't leave scratches and indentations on pounded materials like steel-headed hammers do.

Joel Trusty still marvels at his father's ingenuity. He admits it took some time to get a grasp on his father's system of making molds for hammers and the other custom parts that have become Trusty-Cook's trademark.

"His background was in electronics, but my dad was part scientist, part artist, part inventor."

Joel Trusty, Trusty-Cook co-owner

"His background was in electronics, but my dad was part scientist, part artist, part inventor," Joel Trusty said. "I still find a lot of what he did amazing."

Hammer-headed defiance

Hammers still make up 53 percent of Trusty-Cook's revenue, but spindle liners, now 22 percent of sales, might have the greatest growth potential, Joel Trusty said.

Even though the average spindle liner costs \$200, Joel Trusty said the liners make CNC—or computer numerically controlled—manufacturing machines so much more efficient that machine shop operators find them worth the price. Compared with Trusty-Cook's hammers, which cost \$7 to \$70, the spindle liner is a high-ticket item, and has a healthy margin.

Trusty-Cook at a glance

Service: makes screw machine hush tubes and CNC spindle liners for the manufacturing and machining industry, wear shoes for the wastewater treatment industry, and dead blow hammers

Address: 10530 E. 59th St.

Founded: 1987

Founder: Jon C. Trusty Sr.

Owners: Jerry, Joel, Jon Jr. "Buddy" and Julie Trusty

Employees: 22

Fiscal 2005 revenue: \$2.5 million

Revenue growth in last year: 45 percent

Phone: 823-6821

Web site: www.trusty-cook.com

Source: Trusty Cook Inc.

Neither product was an easy sale.

When tool makers refused to buy Jon Trusty's urethane hammers, he made and marketed the product himself through local distributors. The hammers made their way into the hands of mechanics and craftsmen locally, then nationally. When end users started demanding the product, manufacturers took notice.

The hammers became so popular, Jon Trusty sold the company he founded in 1972 to make them—Compo Cast Inc.—to Connecticut-based toolmaker Stanley Works in 1980.

When his non-compete agreement with Stanley expired in 1990, Jon Trusty re-engineered his hammers and re-entered the market under the Trusty-Cook name, again becoming an industry leader. Trusty also used his expertise in urethane to make other industrial products.

Just open the box

Trusty-Cook's spindle liner business was born almost by accident. A local client, Best Access Systems, asked Trusty-Cook officials in 1999 if they could use their urethane molding skills to make a better spindle liner. Company officials thought the eight spindle liners were a one-time job.

"[Best Access officials] called and told us that was the best money they had ever spent," Joel Trusty said. "I said, 'Tell me more.'"

In true old-school form, Joel and his brothers showed up in Chicago in 2001 at the biggest manufacturing trade show in North America with nothing more than a backpack full of their bright red urethane spindle liners. Machine shop operators took notice, Sevelow said, but the companies that made CNC machines were uninterested.

The Trustys, like their father, aren't afraid to use unconventional means to make their point.

When Joel sent a box of Trusty-Cook spindle liners to one of the top CNC machine manufacturers, and an engineer there refused to open it, Joel asked how to spell the man's name. Joel then said he was writing on his desk calendar that the engineer was the "stupidest person on the face of the Earth."

"I was telling this guy we could make his product work with better precision and 60 percent more efficient for his customers, and he didn't have time to even look at our product," Joel Trusty said.

Old path, new prosperity

So company officials again went straight to end users.

"It's like my dad did with dead blow hammers," Joel Trusty said. "The end users started demanding the product from distributors. That's how you get the attention of corporate headquarters."

This year, Trusty-Cook began negotiations with one of the biggest worldwide CNC machine manufacturers to supply their machines with spindle liners.

Eddie Trotta, who operates Thunder Cycle Designs, a custom motorcycle company based in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., was one of the end users to voice support for Trusty-Cook.

Trotta, who has long used Trusty-Cook hammers, found machining chrome parts often led to scratching, and he was having difficulty with the precision he demanded for his finished products.

"Reworking these pieces was becoming expensive and time-consuming," said Trotta, a regular on the TV show "Biker Build-Off." "The company that made the machine didn't have any answers, so really, there was no place else to turn. Trusty-Cook has been as good as gold, and I'm not shy about telling people."*