

PMPA Member ABF Engineering and Machining Finds Success in its Product Quality and Internal Software Development

Sometime around the late 1970s, Alton, Joan and William (Bill) Wynn decided to leave the big city bustle of Chicago to start their own machine shop in their home state of Tennessee. So, the Wynn's loaded up a rickety old trailer with a Brown and Sharpe 2G screw machine and drove it down to Hollow Rock, Tennessee. The building where the shop was located was so small, the only way to load steel bars into the shop was through a series of holes cut into the wall. In 1989, they eventually founded ABF Engineering and Machining. With only eight full-time employees, three of which are family, ABF Engineering and Machining has stayed true to its small town roots, but that hasn't stopped the company from becoming a leading manufacturer of fasteners, shafts, rivets, bushings, conduit fittings, threaded rods and many other types of parts for a number of different industries.



"We have a 'zero-defect' policy, so it's a very big deal for us if a customer receives a reject part," says David Wynn, chief financial officer at ABF Engineering and Machining. "We strive to send out parts that are only at 100 percent quality. We have customers who don't do receiving inspection because we hold our quality to such a high standard."

ABF found early success in manufacturing components for push-pull cables and fluid control parts. As technology advanced within certain industries, ABF learned to pivot to other industries and now offers production machining, milling, drilling and other services for industries including aircraft, automotive, consumer goods and marine.

In addition to its high quality standards, one of ABF's biggest competitive advantages is its internal software development. Both Mr. Wynn and his father have backgrounds in software, so the company decided early on to design their own enterprise resource planning (ERP) software and electronic controllers. By creating its software in house, Mr. Wynn says ABF is able to make adjustments to the software in a

matter of days, as opposed to waiting months or even years outsourcing the service.

"We are trying to get out in front of this automation technology wave and use our background in software development to breathe new life into old equipment," Mr. Wynn says. "It's also important to automate as many tasks as we can, so our team can focus more on being engineers and high-level operators."

Several years ago, in an attempt to maximize efficiency in the workplace, ABF decided to only keep skilled workers on its staff. Everyone on the shop floor is a trained machinist, with a goal of training their way up to become process engineers. Mr. Wynn says he intentionally keeps the staff as small as possible so the company can maintain its flexible hours and open overtime policy for its employees. In addition to the benefits of having a flexible work schedule, Mr. Wynn believes ABF's dedication to software and other modern technologies makes the company appealing to young people entering the workforce.

"The main thing for us is finding someone with that desire to be part of the team," Mr. Wynn says. "As a millennial myself, I've found that it's been easier for us to attract young people. We are trying to build a network of training modules where someone can onboard quickly and get the skills they need from receiving mentoring from us and other operators, as well as through digital means."

As a PMPA member, Mr. Wynn says ABF greatly benefits from the learning and networking opportunities it receives from attending its conferences. Each year, ABF brings every member of its staff to the PMPA National Technical Conference to meet and gain new insights from members of other shops and learn about the latest industry trends.

"PMPA has been great for us in a lot of ways," Mr. Wynn says. "For years, we had our heads in the sand when it came to new equipment, but in the PMPA, we met others that had to make that jump which gave us a springboard of information to do the same. It's nice having those other members to bounce ideas off of and receiving input for what has worked in their shops. It's very good for the industry."

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