

PMPA Member Ashley Ward Finds Success in Equipment Investment and Vertical Integration

Established more than a century ago, Ashley Ward Inc. has become one of the United States' largest companies in the screw machine industry, with five locations across the country. The company was founded in 1908 by Ashley F. Ward in Cincinnati, Ohio, and has since moved to Mason, Ohio, a nearby suburb of Cincinnati, where its headquarters reside today. Now in its third generation, Ashley Ward is still family owned with more than 200 employees that help produce thousands of different parts for several different industries, including appliance, lawn and garden, hydraulic valve, defense, cable connector and automotive.

"Being a family owned company is a big factor to our success," says Brian Scalf, vice president at Ashley Ward. "The Ward family has been willing to invest in the right buildings and equipment necessary to continue our long-term growth. Ashley Ward has set itself up for continued growth and success in hopes of providing another 100-plus years of precision machining solutions."

Ashley Ward Inc. first began to experience exponential growth in the 1980s under the leadership of Bill Ward, grandson of founder Ashley F. Ward. Through acquisitions and adding new facilities, Mr. Ward expanded the company's machining operations making it easier to serve its customers, no matter their location. Today, the company has divisions located in Ohio, Indiana and Florida.

"Our capacity is a competitive advantage," says Nate Ruhenkamp, director of sales and marketing at Ashley Ward. "We offer very high-volume solutions and can take on large projects without a hitch. It's not that we just have a lot of machines, we have a lot of different types of machines to provide many types of offerings."

Much of Ashley Ward's success is owed to its push for more vertical integration to better serve its customers and launch into new industries. In addition to screw machining, the company offers CNC turning, Hydromat rotary transfer machining, spline/thread rolling, gear hobbing/cutting, induction heat treatment, centerless grinding services and cold drawn steel.

"Vertical integration enables us to be a one-stop shop for companies that need a particular type of product," Mr. Scalf says. "For example, if a customer needs a shaft for a washing machine, we can source the cold drawn steel from our sister company, Cincinnati Cold Drawn, and then do all the machining, heat

treating, grinding and gear hobbing in-house to deliver the finished product without sending it out for any operations."

In addition to new equipment and facilities, Ashley Ward also invests heavily in its employees. Part of Ashley Ward's high employee retention is owed to the incentive programs it offers to all its workers. While its sales employees earn commission, the company's other departments have the opportunity to earn bonuses based on production and the quality of their work.

"Once our employees figure out that this company is the right fit for them, they tend to stay a long time," Mr. Scalf says. "We often joke that if you make it through the first year here, you'll make it for life. Giving employees incentives for efficiency and quality gives them ownership over their departments."

As a PMPA member, Ashley Ward uses many of the organization's local and national meetings, including the National Technical Conference, which educates members on current trends and techniques within the industry. The company also takes advantage of the wealth of information available on PMPA's listserves.

"We see PMPA as a voice for all the small shops that provide representation at a bigger table," Mr. Ruhenkamp says. "We as members are competitors, but everyone involved with PMPA is willing to help each other. Collectively, we can achieve a lot more."

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