

# PMPA Member Huron Automatic Screw Co. Finds Success in Strategic Planning and Reliability

In 1931, while the country was in the throes of the Great Depression, starting a business from scratch was the last thing on any American's mind. However, Keith E. Brooks, a lifelong journeyman machinist, was determined to persevere and open what would become Huron Automatic Screw Co. in a small barn in Port Huron, Michigan. In its earliest days, Mr. Brooks would run parts, mostly threaded fasteners, and drive them to Detroit to sell them to some of the biggest names in the automotive industry, including Chevrolet and GM. While Mr. Brooks was busy in the shop, his wife, Lucy, was keeping the books.

"My grandmother was very ahead of her time as a businesswoman in the 1940s and 1950s," says Edward K. Brooks, co-owner at Huron Automatic Screw Co. "She was very involved as a partner in the business, even while having to raise five children."

After several relocations, in 1959, Huron Automatic Screw Co. moved to its current, 36,000-square-foot facility in St. Clair Township, Michigan. Keith E. Brooks passed the business along to his sons, Allen and Walter, in the 1950s. Walter's sons, Edward, David and Warren, assumed ownership in the mid-1990s. Finding the automotive industry to be too volatile, the company switched its focus to the power truck, off-road and agricultural industries. However, Mr. Brooks describes Huron Automatic as a job shop that specializes in externally threaded fasteners capable of making parts for a variety of industries, including performance racing and marine applications.

"We are well-known in the marketplace for our quality and reliability," Mr. Brooks says. "Although, there are many that say, because there are so many different certifications, quality is an equalizer. I still think it's a differentiator for us, because we have seen numerous occasions with other companies where parts have been offshored and have lost their quality."

A major turning point in Huron Automatic's success began about 20 years ago, when the company started to invest more time in its strategic planning. Some of the methods included return-on-investment analysis, creating targets for sales and the development of a five-year facility and equipment plan. The company's massive facility and equipment plan involved moving every piece of equipment to maximize space, replacing old parts of the production floor and moving the quality center to the middle of the plant. The end result was a complete reorganization that



provided more efficiency, increased productivity and shorter cycle times. Huron Automatic's planning and financial research also led to the purchase of its six-spindle, full CNC-controlled machine, its biggest investment to date.

"The justification for the purchase was based on our current jobs," Mr. Brooks says. "We asked, 'What do we have right now that we could run more effectively?' The machine provides a lot of capabilities we didn't have before, and it's become our showpiece."

Huron Automatic Screw Co.'s ties to PMPA date back to the organization's earliest days. It has been a member since 1933, and the organization continues to provide Huron Automatic with a number of networking opportunities and ways to exchange ideas with other businesses in the industry.

"Almost since its inception, we have been very involved in PMPA meetings, and my family has held numerous leadership positions and has been a part of several different committees," Mr. Brooks says. "One of the core benefits of the association is open sharing, and we have come home from meetings and conferences with so many new ideas about cutting tools and machines, but we've also been able to contribute many ideas as well. We're all competitors, but we're friendly competitors."

*Huron Automatic Screw Co. is located at 4918 Gratiot Ave., St. Clair, Michigan 48079. Phone: 810-364-6636. Website: [huronauto.com](http://huronauto.com)*