



MIDWEST

www.estesdm.com / Phone: (317) 899-2203 / Headquarters: Indianapolis / Specialty: Sheet metal fabrication / Tim Estes, President: "We try to be customer-focused in everything we do."

INNER STRENGTH

HIRING AND LEAN ARE AT THE CORE OF ESTES DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING'S OPERATIONS. BY JIM HARRIS



Estes Design and Manufacturing Inc. looks for more than qualifications and experience when it hires new staff members. "We're looking for people of character," Vice President of Operations Ron Estes says. "We put a lot of effort into the pre-employment screening process to make sure the people we hire are dependable, trustworthy and motivated. We want people who will retire with us."

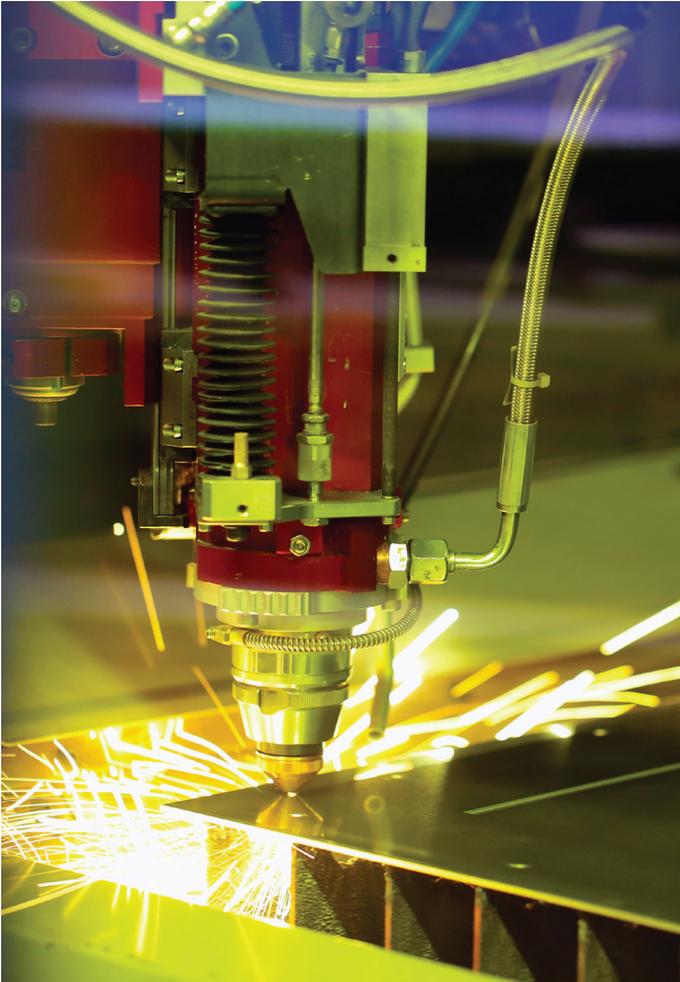
The Indianapolis-based company's screening efforts have paid off in employee loyalty and low turnover. A

few of the company's employees have worked at Estes Design and Manufacturing since it opened its doors in 1976, and several others have been there for 35 years or longer.

The company invests in its workforce in several ways including training. Estes Design and Manufacturing maintains a training matrix that tracks the proficiency level of each of its employees on its machines and processes. The matrix helps determine which employees would benefit from focused training, Ron Estes says.

Estes Design and Manufacturing has an internal culture based around the company's core values of people, kaizen/continuous improvement, nimbleness, communication and innovation. "We try to create an environment where we create opportunities for people who have given us their loyalty, time and talent," President Tim Estes says.

Following its core values has given the company a positive reputation in its industry. "We're proud to have a good name in the marketplace be- >>



cause of not just our longevity, but because we do what we say," he adds. "We try to be customer-focused in everything we do."

MEETING CHANGING NEEDS

Estes Design and Manufacturing is a full-service sheet metal fabricator that serves customers in a broad range of product and industry applications including medical equipment, appliances, HVAC, office furniture manufacturing and aerospace components. Its services include product design, engineering, rapid prototyping and precision sheet metal fabricating.

The company has expanded its operations several times during its 40-year history. Most recently, Estes Design and Manufacturing in 2014 added space to its facility, bringing it to 85,000 square feet. The facility is ISO 9001 and ISO 13485 certified and Food and Drug Administration and Good Manufacturing Practice compliant.

All of Estes' expansions have been based on custom-

ers' needs. "We are constantly adapting our business to the ever-changing needs of the market," Tim Estes says. "Lead times and time to market for new products are shrinking. Our goal is to be the critical resource for our customers in assisting them with developing new products, reducing time to market and managing their demands for shorter lead times, smaller lot sizes and quicker turns in general."

INVESTING IN TECHNOLOGY

Estes Design and Manufacturing regularly invests in machines and new technology that enable it to meet its customers' demands.

"Our objective is to be a leader in the sheet metal fabrication industry in several areas, one of those being technology," Ron Estes says. "We are constantly searching for technology that allows us to do what we do more efficiently and accurately."

The company's manufacturing floor includes nine Salvagnini machines including bending, laser cutting, and punching and shearing machines. The centerpiece of the manufacturing operation is a cell with two punching and shearing machines, a panel bending machine and a laser cutting machine integrated with an automated storage and retrieval system with more than 175 trays that can hold either sheets or processed blanks. The company supplies many of its customers through a kanban management system.

A recent addition to the company's equipment lineup is an Amada automatic tool change press brake that can change tooling and setups on any job in less than two





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minutes. “That was a game changer for us,” Ron Estes says. “Having technology that reduces setup times from 30 minutes to an hour on a traditional press brake to two minutes means we can run smaller lot sizes, better manage our inventory and shorten lead times.”

The company also features a Salvagnini P2lean bending machine that can set up the next job, including loading the program and adjusting the tooling, based on input from a barcode reader; and a laser welding machine capable of welding light-gauge sheet metal.

IMMEDIATE ACTION

Estes Design and Manufacturing’s equipment investments reflect its overall commitment to lean manufacturing. “Our goal is to find and eliminate waste, no matter where it lies,” Ron Estes says.

The company’s manufacturing cells are process-oriented or product-centered. A cell leader supervises the activities of their cell using a daily layered accountability system. Every day begins with a huddle in front of a white board, which lists the cell’s target metrics and its metrics from the previous day.

“Our cell leaders have the freedom to make immediate adjustments based on what happened the previous day,” he adds. “We believe in digging into the root cause of any problems taking action so the next day we’re not dealing with the same issue.”

Overall, Estes Design and Manufacturing believes in providing the best service and quality for its customers. The company’s commitment to meeting changing needs, investing in technology and immediate action are ways in which Estes Design and Manufacturing provides a competitive advantage to its customers. **mt**