



INNOVATIVE METALFORMING SOLUTIONS

www.EJAjax.com

Phone: 763-571-1660

Email: info@EJAjax.com

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Innovator

Bending the Growth Curve

Demand for metalformed products is up. How will EJ Ajax Respond?

Despite a harsh winter and scarcity of qualified CNC metalforming professionals, US manufacturing expanded in February for the ninth consecutive month. Supplier and customer inventories within the fabricated metal sector were lower. This news signals an uptick in demand for companies who provide precision metalforming.

Upward demand cycles are both encouraging and challenging for precision metalforming company EJ Ajax of Minneapolis. Don Wellman, Vice President of Sales and Purchasing, expects continued growth in several areas,



including fiber optic laser cutting, stamping, sheet metal forming, press brake forming, and turret press punching.

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Customer Profile: G&R Custom Elevators

A Cab Ride From a Barn to Abu Dhabi

In 1978, business partners Gary Mundis and Ron Hudak began shipping the first of their customized elevator cabs from a barn in Andover, Minnesota. Although both men are now retired from the company they built, the start-up stories live on.



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ISO Certification Update

European ISO Firm IMSM Commissioned by EJ Ajax

ISO specialist Eden Solutions Group of Minneapolis, in association with UK-based ISO consulting firm IMSM, has announced that EJ Ajax has commissioned IMSM to implement an ISO Quality Management System during 2014.

“This company’s decision to pursue ISO certification will support them in marketing, processes, commitment to quality, client satisfaction, and continual improvement,” said Eden Solutions Principal Delrae Eden. “We congratulate EJ Ajax on engaging the only international standard that is recognized worldwide.”

Key Account Manager Claims STEP Award

2014 STEP Award is the latest honor for EJ Ajax Key Accounts Manager Altheha DrePaul.



Altheha DrePaul has been getting noticed lately. Back in October of 2011, AOL Original ran a story about Altheha's career setback and her determination to find new opportunities in manufacturing. In June, 2011, the Minneapolis Star Tribune covered a portion of her story during a write-up about a presidential visit to EJ Ajax.

In September of 2013, Precision Manufacturing Journal published a detailed story about her ascension in manufacturing at EJ Ajax that contained this memorable quote: "I remember a bicycle my parents bought me. It was from China, and poorly made. Spokes were missing, parts were bent. I remember saying to myself as that child, 'I would like to do something better than this.'"

Then, earlier this year, The Manufacturing Institute announced the 2014 STEP Award honorees and (you guessed it) Altheha was on the list. Not only that, she was asked to be a featured speaker at the STEP Awards banquet on Capitol Hill in Washington DC on February 6. The STEP (Science, Technology, Engineering and Production) program recognize women who have demonstrated excellence and leadership in their careers and represent all levels of the manufacturing industry, from the factory floor to the executive suite.

DrePaul is one of only four members of the Precision Metalforming Association to have received this honor in 2014. "I will continue to promote advanced modern manufacturing as a rewarding career choice to women who have strong STEM skills and a desire to work with their hands and their minds," Altheha said following the award.

Altheha has used her desire, dedication, and discipline along her path to amazing personal achievement. The entire EJ Ajax community congratulates Althea and wishes her continued career success.

Accolades

EJ Ajax invests 5.5% of payroll into workforce education, training, and professional development. A key component of this investment has been affiliation with technical colleges in the Minneapolis/St. Paul, Minnesota area. Read what three prominent technical college leaders have to say about the company's participation in technical college programs.

"EJ Ajax has been a driving force with industry-leading support for the successful M-Powered program. We deeply appreciate the advocacy locally and at the national level for continued support with this unique workforce development program. EJ Ajax also recognizes the value of workplace-based experiences through a vibrant internship program that pays students \$15 per hour on their way to, in most cases, offers of fulltime employment at industry competitive wages and great benefits!"

*Mike McGee
Dean of Manufacturing
Hennepin Technical College*

"A \$10,000 scholarship, \$15 per hour internship and the opportunity to come on full-time after graduation, EJ Ajax provides Dunwoody students with a life-changing opportunity. Rather than working part-time in retail or fast-food, students are afforded the opportunity to work in the industry, continue learning and collect scholarship money. Dunwoody College truly appreciates the dedication and support EJ Ajax provides manufacturing students."

*E.J. Daigle
Dean – Robotics & Manufacturing Technology
Dunwoody College of Technology*

"EJ Ajax has been a large contributor to Anoka Technical College's, Precision Sheet Metal Program. EJ Ajax supported us during our various equipment donations and also sat on our advisory board which shaped the curriculum of the program. In addition to all those activities, EJ Ajax has hired over 12 of our graduates since the beginning of the program to full time positions. EJ Ajax has been a great partner with our Precision Sheet Metal program"

*Jamie Barthel
Executive Director, Professional and Workforce Training
Anoka Technical College*

"Fortunately, we became active in workforce development early on," said company co-owner Erick Ajax. "Proximity to these institutions is a huge advantage for our company."

“The new orders are great, but customers expect you to be faster, smarter, and more innovative than last year,” Don said. “If you stand still, even for a month or two, you’ll find yourself playing catch-up. We intend to bend the growth curve in our favor.”

Item one on the checklist is room to grow. EJ Ajax is expanding the production floor space by 30% in 2014. However, adding space is not enough. “Growing the business means more than buying the latest technology and recruiting top employees,” Don said. “We’ve also leaned out our processes, rearranged production flow, and found new ways to reduce time and materials waste. We’ve got six sigma accredited employees in the mix. We even had to create a temporary break room because we needed that space for production” he said with a grin.

Don said that logistics will become another immediate area of focus for EJ Ajax. “Products stuck in a warehouse don’t do our customers any good,” he said. “So we are constantly improving packaging and shipping times. We want to move something once instead of three times. We apply Kanban principles everywhere we can.”

Yet another ongoing change is the increased size and weight of products the company produces. “New technology has given us the capability to form metals in ways that were not possible just a few years ago,” Don said. “The work is getting bigger. That means we’re shipping larger containers and pallets. With our expansion and improved methods, we now have the space to do that.”

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“The barn had livestock. Sometimes chicken droppings ended up on the shipping containers they sent to clients,” laughs current company

president Ken Persons. “But the work was good.”

Good indeed. G&R Elevator Manufacturing has produced elevator cabs for upscale office towers, luxury hotels, hospitals, and retail complexes worldwide. The company’s Facebook page contains hundreds of photos of their work, including the Hyatt Regency Hotel at Chicago O’Hare International Airport, the Abu Dhabi Financial Center in the United Arab Emirates, and the 8200 Tower in Bloomington, Minnesota.

G & R has produced elevator cabs for all four of the world’s largest elevator systems contractors: Otis Elevator Company, headquartered in Farmington, Connecticut; ThyssenKrupp of Essen, Germany; Schindler of Lucerne, Switzerland; KONE Corporation of Espoo, Finland.

What’s an Elevator Cab?

The elevator “box” that you walk into and ride in is called the cab or car. In Europe they are often called cabins. Commercial interior designers and architects consider the cab to be an extremely important component of an upscale building.

“When people step into an elevator, they notice details that would ordinarily get overlooked. It’s a small space and people see the materials and workmanship up close,” Persons said. “You make a statement to visitors when your elevator cab is impressive. Business firms and hotels want that good first impression.”

Persons said G&R uses stainless steel, aluminum, wood, veneers, glass, Corian™, leather, Formica™, and a variety of textures and lighting styles to offer architects a wide range of design alternatives. When producing highly-customized cabs, G&R creates full-size, detailed mockups prior to manufacture so designers and architects can preview workmanship.

“An architect will spend an hour inside our mockup on our shop floor, inspecting every tiny detail,” he said. “Then they will come discuss the project with our team for an hour. Then they will go back and inspect the mockup for another hour. It’s that important to them.”

Abu Dhabi Financial Center

G&R worked directly with renowned architectural firm Goettsch Partners of Chicago to produce the Abu Dhabi Financial Center cabs. The Abu Dhabi cab designers used suspended glass, etched glass, and pattern glass lighted by LED strip lighting to create a stunning internal and external look. G&R manufactured the cabs for both the

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office building and the parking ramp.

Persons said G&R Sales Manager John Omorean used his years of experience and good relationship with Goettsch Partners to win the Abu Dhabi contract. “Architects expect us to speak their language and add value to their concepts,” Persons said. “Our team does that. We can provide more creative options without losing sight of costs.”

Persons said another key is to bring manufacturing quality to the table. “We have a shop full of experienced craftsmen who produce stunning cabs. Sometimes we pick up custom jobs for that reason alone.”

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The incorporation of quality management software has made a significant difference in the way the company manages its processes, Don said. “We use uniPoint software for tooling and equipment, document control, safety and health, and customer service,” he said. “If we can find a new way to improve workflow, chances are we’ll make that investment.”

** Industry data provided by the February 2014 Manufacturing Report On Business, distributed by the Institute for Supply Management*

FAQ:

Q: Why should EJ Ajax customers care about our safety record?

A: A: Manufacturing carries an inherent measure of workforce injury risk. Naturally, EJ Ajax wants to minimize the potential for hardship of any kind among our employee colleagues and their families. Beyond that personal interest, there solid business reasons to highlight safety:

- Our good safety record has kept our insurance premiums among the lowest in the industry, which enables us to remain very cost-competitive.
- OSHA inspection preparedness is a vital means of avoiding compliance issues. EJ Ajax averages one visit per month from large companies who seek to learn why our OSHA compliance process has been so successful.
- Precision metalforming is in a growth mode, and qualified metalforming pros are scarce. A safety incident could potentially impact workflow.

EJ Ajax is one of only 36 Minnesota companies that are approved by the Minnesota Safety and Health Achievement Recognition Program (MNSHARP). Benefits include no-cost safety consultations, public recognition for employees, and exemption from OSHA scheduled compliance inspections.

By staying proactive, EJ Ajax hopes to maintain our solid safety record and pass the benefits along to our customers.

In The News

There’s alot going on at EJ Ajax these days. Here’s a quick roundup of recent developments.

Bigger

Managers at EJ Ajax plan to expand production floor space by 30% during 2014. The company will expand skilled workforce by a similar amount as well.

Better

EJ Ajax has commissioned UK-based ISO consulting firm IMSM to implement an ISO Quality Management System during 2014. This puts the company on a solid path towards ISO certification.

Newer

The company has begun investing in new capital equipment, and will continue to invest further during 2014. Proof of this is the recently-installed racking system that enables forklift operators to

access, handle, and store sheet metals with far greater efficiency and safety.

Here is a short listing of EJ Ajax events from the 1st quarter of 2014:

State of the Union POV

Erick Ajax attended the 2014 State of the Union address on Capitol Hill in Washington DC on January 28, 2014. Erick’s host was Minnesota Senator Al Franken.

Safety Culture Keynote

Erick was the keynote speaker at the Mid-America OSHA Training Institute event on January 16, 2014. The title of Erick’s speech was “Pioneering an Incident Free Safety Culture.”