

MNFX and Ajax to the Rescue



"You made that at your work, didn't you, Dad?" EJ Ajax Vice-President Don Wellman enjoys hearing that question from his kids when "Reagan's Moon," a commercial for the University of Minnesota Amplatz Children's Hospital, airs on television. Although EJ Ajax components are in lots of products you encounter every day—from home freezers and pressure cookers to elevator panels—few offer the high visibility that comes with being televised on a Gophers game or screened in a motion picture theater before a feature film.

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Your Supply Chain Partners

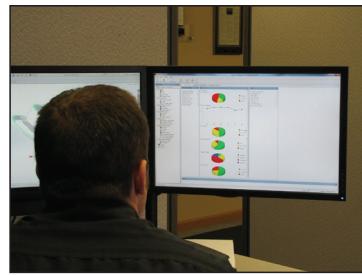


Being a trusted vendor involves more than producing a quality part. EJ Ajax continues to look for ways to add value throughout the supply chain.

For example, we add an isometric image of your part right on the label. That makes it easy for your employees to recognize and pull the right part without having to look it up—even when the part numbers are nearly identical.

EJ Ajax also prints labels in 2D. "Customers can scan to get everything on that tag to the computer screen in one click," Vice-President Don Wellman said. "You can even scan with a smart phone. That quick visual management is helpful on both ends of the supply chain."

Making a Point of Metrics



Quality Technician Brad McKnight using the UniPoint system

The old saying is "you can only manage what you can measure." At EJ Ajax, we're making better use of our UniPoint software to provide more accurate measures—and management—of a range of quality issues.

Although UniPoint has been in-house for a while, "We're making more use of what we had," EJ Ajax Quality Technician Brad McKnight said. "We've expanded into nonconformances—customer, vendor or in-process. With UniPoint, we're now able to see patterns and see

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Meet Our New HR Director, Curt Jasper



Mary Emmen, our previous human resources manager, served with distinction for more than 20 years—both at EJ Ajax and with the Minnesota National Guard. When she announced she was leaving, we wondered who we could find to fill her shoes. As it turned out, Mary and Erick first met Curt at a veteran's job fair. Like Mary, Curt had many years of distinguished service in the National Guard. He retired after 28 years as Command Sergeant Major, working with MN, ND, SD, IA at the Division Level. It quickly became apparent that his background in both human resources and operations were the ideal skillset to take Mary's good work to the next level.

Here's what Curt has to say about his new role:

Between 2003 and 2010, I was deployed for 32 months. My wife didn't want me to leave again. Besides, the military is a young group. It was time.

Initially, I didn't think about manufacturing as an option. Some other people told me I should look at the industry. I did some informational interviews and an all-day event where I saw the whole aspect—operations, shipping, quality control.

At the job fair, Erick asked me if I'd done human

resources. I had 1000 individuals under me in Iraq. I was their HR manager. I handled discipline, policies and systems. I liked the fact that EJ Ajax was family-owned. It's small. It's not a big company where you couldn't affect what your day was going to be. It's a place where I could impact and help people. I would be working with individuals from all levels, just like Iraq, with operators on the floor and with the owners. Being a doer and a decision-maker is better for me than just being a decision-maker. I'm down there on the floor making sure we're doing the right thing.

Every organization has something they have to get better at. Erick, Tom and Kent wanted me to get better consistency from each operator of each machine on every shift.

That fit in with my past experience, from seeing the big picture to putting a process and system into place. Everyone has processes and systems, but to align them through different departments, that's the hard part. I do that very well because I had eight companies underneath me that I had to align and develop and sustain.

We're changing the apprenticeship completely from hour-based to competency-based. That says a lot for Erick and our supervisors who are doing the competency testing. We want to train more people and get them functioning at higher levels. That's what we want—to get people as much information as possible, to make EJ Ajax a better and more productive place.

In the military, we cross-train everybody. In Iraq our job was to convoy supplies. Four trucks, 3 people in each truck, escorted 30 semi-trailers of supplies. Each truck had a gunner, a driver and a truck commander. There were some incidents where the gunner would get hurt, and driver would have a hard time running the gun. Or the TC would get hurt and the driver couldn't run the computer systems. I put together a system so that everyone could do each other's jobs. It was implemented in our battalion, then to whole southern Iraq sector. My approach to training at EJ Ajax does come from my military background. You always worry about what happens when someone falls over.

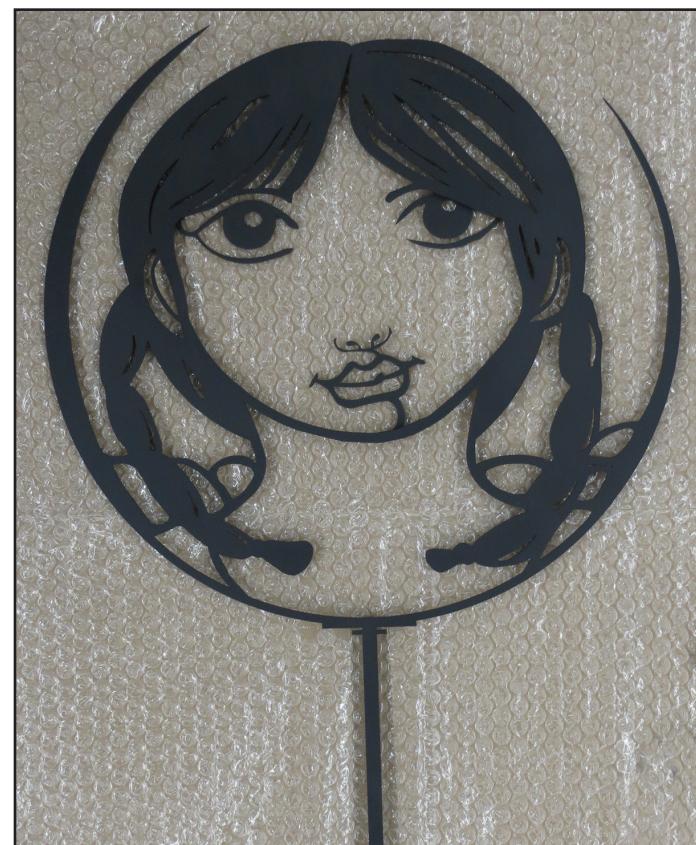


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The concept was developed by a New York agency that had a water-jet cutting operation lined up. When that fell through, the agency turned to MNFX, a Twin Cities company that creates props, models and exhibits for advertising agencies and corporate clients.

"We were brought in at the last minute, to save the day," said Mike Falcone of MNFX. He turned to EJ Ajax because he had seen their fiber optic laser cutter during a tour of the factory when he came in to pick up parts from a previous job. "We first contacted EJ Ajax maybe a week and a half from the shoot. There was some back and forth, talking with Don, getting pricing, making sure he could do it in the time frame. By the time we got the art files, it was Friday, and we had to deliver the following Thursday and Friday."

Although the pace was hectic, he said, "Between us and Ajax it went smoothly. They were real accommodating about fitting the stuff into our timeline. They were good about the agency making last-minute changes and adding files."



Falcone appreciated the flexibility EJ Ajax offered. "I think this kind of project tends to be out of the box for them. In the past we've brought in some vendors that look at what we do, and they have the capability of doing it, but they think it's too 'artsy' and won't do it," Falcone said. "Also, it helped them see what their fiber optic laser cutter do. Don took a test file and did a test piece to make sure it had the detail we wanted."

MNFX has already provided EJ Ajax with its next assignment, another highly visible project that will debut by the end of the year.

Stay tuned!

In the News



Erick Ajax was honored to co-author an Op-Ed with Minnesota Senator Al Franken on the need for a bipartisan approach to closing the skills gap.

<http://www.startribune.com/opinion/commentaries/231219811.html>

Erick also traveled to Washington D.C. with more than 50 other Business Leaders United for Workforce Partnerships (BLU). At a joint discussion with Secretary of Commerce Penny Pritzker, Secretary of Labor Tom Perez and National Economic Council Director Gene Sperling, the group shared their ideas for a more

concerted national skills policy driven by sector partnerships. "It was amazing to get so many people all at the same table. We agreed we need to find a way to work together," Erick Ajax said.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=41SF8xcbQtg>



Key Account Manager Altheha DrePaul was featured in Precision Manufacturing—Minnesota for her "Upward Spiral" on the manufacturing career ladder.

<http://pm-mn.com/2013/09/whos-who-altheha-drepaul/>

Photo courtesy: Precision Manufacturing Journal

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where our issues are coming from." McKnight said he now runs a report on nonconformances and brings the top three parts into the monthly quality assurance meeting for review and root cause analysis.

Last month, the scrap and rework report highlighted an issue that "was known, but nobody really talked about it," McKnight said. "You have one operator run a machine for a couple of hours, and he'd scrap two or three parts. Then another operator takes over. Each operator is thinking, 'I only scrapped a couple.' But for a job that runs over a couple of days, we didn't realize the severity of the problem." As a result of the UniPoint metrics, the problem was traced to a tooling issue that has been resolved and the high scrap volumes have been eliminated.

Vendor nonconformances are also tracked, and the vendor history is checked before new orders are placed. "We have one supplier we no longer use," McKnight said.

The expanded use of UniPoint not only provides better data—it provides data faster. "We have access to inspections forms anywhere in the building," McKnight said. "In the past if a customer called up, we had to go find the old job paper. Now while we're talking we can call it up, email it to them and print it out in less than a minute."

Most recently, toolmaker Joe Brudzinski entered all the punch press tooling into UniPoint. "It used to be that repairs were put on a piece of paper and put in a filing cabinet," McKnight said. "Now we have instant access to records of all maintenance, repairs and upgrades." The next step will be to enter information for the punch presses themselves.

A recently added Health and Safety module expands the use of UniPoint from manufactured parts and tooling to the most important resource at EJ Ajax—the people. "UniPoint now gives our safety committee and management team a big-screen view of what's been going on with near-misses. Again we have the ability to track and trend where we're seeing challenges," Erick Ajax said. "We can track the Globally Harmonized System (GHS) for hazard communication, which is a Federal OSHA requirement. UniPont will also be a huge help with our

upcoming renewal of the Minnesota Safety and Health Achievement Recognition Program. This is our fourth MN SHARP recertification, and they keep ratcheting up the standards every time. We'll have everything documented in one place. That will save us countless hours."

FAQ:

Q:

What is a reasonable turnaround time for "rapid prototyping"? I requested a rapid prototype from a vendor and was told the leadtime could be up to two months.

A:

The only accurate answer to that question is, "It depends." If the part requires specialty tooling, six to eight weeks is not unreasonable leadtime. That's one of the reasons EJ Ajax has invested in state of the art fabrication equipment: A fiber optic laser cutter in 2012 and a 5-axis press brake in 2013. Often, we can fabricate a prototype or short run cost-effectively by avoiding the time and expense of tooling. Then, when the part moves into full production, we can redesign for progressive stamping to drive out cost.

Even when tooling is needed, we can reduce design time with advanced CAD programming and 3D modeling.

The next time you have a rapid prototyping need, contact us for an answer that provides the optimal balance of speed, quality and cost.

