

# BOURN & KOCH

With capabilities ranging from designing unique machines to remanufacturing and retrofitting, **Bourn & Koch continues its tradition as a true industry innovator.** By Russ Willcutt

**E**ven though Bourn & Koch was established nearly three decades ago, it could be said that its roots actually stretch back more than 100 years through its acquisition of the Fellows Corporation, which was founded in 1896. Even prior to that purchase, Bourn & Koch had bought other industry stalwarts such as the Barber Colman Machine Tool Division and Ferguson Machine Tool, and newer manufacturers such as Roto-Tech were later brought onboard.

"We have added a lot of well-established lines that are now part of our OEM business," says Timothy Helle, who is president of Bourn & Koch. "It's amazing to see some of the parts that we ship out to customers for machines that have been in production for 60 to 70 years and are still producing product. That's because they were built well in the first place, and that's what made the idea of purchasing those companies attractive to us."

The company has a connection with another industry giant as well. Founders Larry Bourn and Loyd Koch worked for Sundstrand Machine Tool Co. for a number of years before they decided to set out on their own. A desire to offer the machine tool industry new products and services led to the establishment of Bourn & Koch's company headquarters in Rockford, Illinois, in 1975.

Since the two had left the company on good terms, they were able to provide services to their former employer, but they also decided to capitalize on services that Sundstrand Machine Tool and others didn't offer: remanufacturing and retrofitting. It was a large portion of their business in the early days, although they also manufactured specialty machines for some of their customers.

Since those days—and with the acquisition of the aforementioned companies—Bourn & Koch has grown far beyond its original reputation as a company mainly involved in building specialty machines and remanufacturing and retrofitting equipment. The company has evolved since that time and has grown into a real player in the new-machine market, with an emphasis on meeting customer needs. They do have standard products, but are not really a commodity manufacturer. "We're not the type of company with a standard catalog of 10 different products to choose from," says Helle. "We're heavily involved in customization and providing unique solutions to the challenges our customers are facing. In fact, that's what we're really selling here—solutions."

It is this energetic, aggressive, proactive approach to doing business that has attracted key personnel. Today, Bourn & Koch is still a privately-owned U.S. company. Major stockholders are Loyd Koch, one of the company's founders, and Helle, who joined Bourn & Koch in 1985. The entire staff has worked hard to streamline the operations in order to maximize efficiency. "And that had to do with everything from where the machines were positioned on the plant floor, to finding ways to run more than one operation at a time, to doing cost analyses to make sure we couldn't buy certain things at a better price than it was costing us to make them," Helle says. "We've invested a lot in modernizing our equipment and facilities, and the use of 'value-engineering' has made sure that we're getting the best possible cost out of our designs while still delivering a robust, high-quality product."

The result is a company that employs some 70 individuals—including an engineering team of 10—with a customer base so broad that it encompasses everything from the defense/aerospace industry, to the heavy equipment/mining/oil

field equipment industry to the automotive industry, to the power-tool markets, among many others. "I would say that, in terms of general percentages, heavy equipment, mining equipment, and oil-field equipment manufacturers make up a pretty significant portion of our client base," he says. "But we also work with aerospace and defense, both contractors and subcontractors, so that's a growing market for us as well."

Growth, in fact, has been a welcome theme of late—especially in terms of sales. "Business has picked up consistently in the last two or three months," says Helle. "We're having a good month in terms of new orders, and I know that it has something to do with our decision to purchase Fellows."

With all of the company's purchases, Helle says the plan is always to take an established line, improve on it, and then begin to release revitalized products into the market. A perfect example is the B&K Fellows HS650 Gearless Gear Shaper that Bourn & Koch plans to introduce at the IMTS show in September, when it will be exhibited in the Star SU booth (*please see "Industry News" section of this issue*). "This machine has a number of new, patented features, and it's really going to make an impact on the gear shaping process," says Helle. "And that's good for the

market as a whole, because it's probably been 15 years—back to the advent of CNC guides—since there have been any real improvements made in gear shapers."

Bourn & Koch believes that this type of innovative thinking is crucial for any business to continue to thrive in today's economic environment. "I think that one of the biggest challenges we're faced with today is convincing people in this industry that you've got to modernize and take advantage of the latest technologies in order to remain competitive in the global marketplace," Helle says. "Too many manufacturers in the United States are caught up in the short-term and aren't thinking strategically for the long-term. You'll hear people say 'well, that's how we did things 20 years ago,' but you've got to let go of the past and start looking to the future. 'What's coming down the road, and how can I be prepared for it?' Those are the kinds of questions people should be asking themselves."

More is also required of the top managers and administrators of manufacturing companies these days, in terms of staying abreast of the latest economic and technological developments. And one of the best ways to achieve this is to maintain a healthy relationship with your customers.

"Working directly with customers to get their feedback is how you keep your finger on the pulse of the industry," Helle says, "by constantly communicating with your customers and making sure that you're living up to their expectations."

To learn more about Bourn & Koch, visit them online at [[www.bourn-koch.com](http://www.bourn-koch.com)]. Helle can be reached at (815) 965-4013, or via e-mail at [tim.helle@bourn-koch.com](mailto:tim.helle@bourn-koch.com).

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