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Enterprise

Heavy Metal

Keeping on the cutting edge, Laciny machines its way to \$4 million

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Business activity: When a company has been in business for 85 years, there is sometimes a tendency to keep doing things the way they always have been done.

That's not the way it works at Laciny Bros. Inc., a custom metal fabricator of manufacturing equipment which experienced a 15-percent increase in business last year.

By investing in the latest equipment, including a \$90,000 computerized press brake, Laciny is able to take on jobs of all sizes. In the past three years, Laciny has added two mills, one lathe and the press brake.

The company specializes in manufacturing equipment to serve the food processing, pharmaceutical and chemical industries, but will take care of jobs as small as \$30. Some of the smaller jobs are referred by metal distributor houses which often have minimum orders of \$150.

With an active customer list of 715, the company's largest clients include Earthgrains, ViJon, Monsanto, Anheuser-Busch, Mallinckrodt, Tums, Ralston, Abbott Labs, ConAgra, KV

Pharmaceutical, the Genetics Institute and Meridian Medical Technologies. Laciny has been named vendor of the year twice by ViJon and once by Meridian.

The company concentrates on the St. Louis market, but will travel to other cities where St. Louis-based companies have operations.

Laciny designs and builds tanks, hoppers, process components, packaging machinery and material handling and conveying equipment. It also will help with research and development and do repair work on equipment. The firm will cut raw material in stock lengths to any size.

One of its most unusual but widely recognized products is a huge shopping cart for Schnuck Markets, which it uses in promotions.

A large inventory of stainless steel, aluminum and carbon steel is kept on hand at the firm's plant on Vernon Avenue in University City. Laciny also stocks pipe, sanitary fittings, fasteners and miscellaneous hardware items.

Laciny's products for the food processing and pharmaceutical industries are geared to help the firms adhere to sanitation and safety standards and are designed to provide easy cleaning.

The company's work force has grown to 38, and Bob Laciny expects it to continue to increase. The firm's workload has been heavy enough to keep workers on the job six days many weeks.

Laciny primarily seeks experienced people for his company, a task he says is tough. "Many younger people are just not interested in this type of work," he said. He has gotten some of the experienced staff recently from such firms as Nooter and Boeing when they cut back their work forces.

Executives: Bob Laciny, 48, is president and owner of Laciny Bros., the third generation to run the family owned business. Laciny started working in the business as a child and took over control of the firm when his aunt, Arleen, retired in 1999. He and his aunt had bought out his uncle in 1991. A native of St. Louis, he grew up in the Webster Groves-Kirkwood area and now lives in Des Peres.

Don Fitzgerald is plant manager; John Ulz is in sales; Rick Gratza heads up the engineering department, and Michele Miller is the office manager.

Company history: Three Laciny brothers started the company in 1916, each investing \$23. They began working primarily as cooper and tinsmiths.

The firm began at Menard and Victor, then moved to LaSalle and Jefferson in the city. They outgrew the 22,000-square-foot facility and in June of 1989 moved to the present location, which has 67,000 square feet.

The shop provides Laciny with plenty of room to build large machines in the plant and bring customers in to see and test machinery. There is also room for the company to grow.

While competitors do many of the same things, few have the range of services or will do the same jobs, Laciny said.

The company set up a Web site in the last year at <http://www.lacinybros.com>.

Revenue: Gross revenue topped \$4 million in 2001, a 15 percent increase in a year.

Professional services: Bob Klevon is the accountant; Steve Leonard, who has his own practice, is the lawyer; Tom Kubat at Jefferson Bank handles financial matters; marketing and public relations are done in-house.

The future: Laciny Bros., which has done little outside sales, plans to step up its efforts in this area in 2002 with Ulz spearheading the effort. The company has plans to increase its marketing and published its first company brochure in the last year.