

Building on a basic formula for success

Weldbend is driven by dedication to quality.

Weldbend Corp. manufactures welding fittings and flanges - hundreds of thousands of them each year. But the Argo, Ill., company (located just south of Chicago) could just as well be a custom fabricating shop. That's because making sure each piece meets strict quality standards is the mission of every one of the firm's several hundred associates.

"There's one key to our success, and that's quality," says Weldbend's 89-year old founder and chairman James Coulas, Sr. "Our business is driven by that philosophy."

Weldbend accomplishes this goal by staying at the forefront of technology. For example, the company recently ordered 10 of the latest pieces of precision machining and manufacturing equipment. Because many products have unique characteristics, Weldbend personnel have chosen to design and engineer several manufacturing presses to specifications needed for the company's output.

"We're growing the business by committing to the latest technology," Coulas says. "My father told me that if you don't grow, there's only one direction to go — and that's backward."

In keeping with the emphasis on quality, once the manufacturing process is completed, each finished production piece is precision tested for proper tolerance. Then it's also checked for adherence to quality standards.

PACKED IN CARTONS

Weldbend has 330,000 sq. ft. of manufacturing and warehouse facilities on a 36-acre site. The company's "on-hand" stocking policy is designed with the customer in mind. Simply put, Weldbend maintains a large inventory so customers don't have to. Whether it's a 1/2-in. elbow or a 24-in. flange, products are only minutes away from the shipping dock.

Weldbend pioneered the packing of carbon-steel welding fittings in cartons. It continues to deliver full-carton orders in strong corrugated boxes for products up to 12 in. at no additional cost to customers.

There are other benefits to using these prepacked cartons:

- allows easier stacking
- protects welded ends from damage
- enables faster inventory counting
- simplifies inventory control
- requires less warehouse storage space
- provides factory-fresh condition at the customer's jobsite.



GP30K
Cat lift
truck

*Left:
Weldbend
designs and
engineers its own
manufacturing presses,
shown here forging
an elbow fitting.*

Weldbend Corporation

LOCATION:
Argo, Illinois

MARKET:
Manufacturer of precision
welding fittings and flanges

CAT LIFT TRUCKS:
2EC30s, GP30Ks, NRR45, NPV60

CAT LIFT TRUCK DEALER:
Calumet Lift Truck,
South Holland, Ill.

TOUGH APPLICATION

Weldbend stores 1,500 to 2,000 different products on racks in the warehouse. "Our application is tougher than the typical warehouse operation because of the weight of our product," President James Coulas, Jr. says. "We depend on lift trucks because we can't use conveyor lines."

The material handling operation requires more than 40 pieces of equipment, including 29 Cat lift trucks ranging in capacity from 6,000 to 25,000 lbs. The latest additions to the Cat lift truck fleet include three 6,000-lb.-capacity GP30Ks (with two more ready for delivery), four 2EC30 electric, an NRR45 reach truck and an NPV60 electric walkie rider. These vehicles work two 11-hour shifts a day, five days a week.

Operators appreciate several features of the Cat lift trucks, including their short turning radius for easy handling and maneuverability, their smooth ride and the cushioned seats.

"Our operators spend all day in the vehicles, so we specify the most comfortable units we can," Weldbend's General Manager, Dave Shulman, says.

To ensure uptime, Weldbend has a Planned Maintenance (PM) agreement with its local Cat lift truck dealer. PMs are performed at four-week intervals and include lubrication and oil change. Lights and other safety items are also checked.

"We believe in repair before failure," Shulman points out. "Because the technician sees our Cat lift trucks monthly, we can head off maintenance



Above: Four 2EC30 electric Cat lift trucks help share the double-shift workload at this busy 330,000-sq.-ft. facility.

Left: Weldbend pioneered the packing of carbon-steel fittings in cartons, which are easily stacked with this NRR45 Cat reach truck.

Below: Moving these large pipes is no problem for the 6,000-lb.-capacity GP30K Cat lift truck.



issues before they become major problems. If he sees something that could lead to a failure, we have it fixed right away."

A practice very much appreciated by Weldbend is the fact that the Cat lift truck dealer sends the same technician for each service visit. As a result, a strong relationship develops between the technician and Weldbend's personnel.


"We trust the service technician and everyone at the Cat lift truck dealership to take good care of our lift trucks. They do what's best for our business," James Jr. says. "It's a system that's worked well for both of us for more than 15 years."

Running long hours with near-capacity loads is a testimonial to the durability and dependability of Cat lift trucks. Another is the fact that Weldbend just recently retired a couple of 1989 models.

"We estimate those Cat lift trucks ran the equivalent of 250,000 miles," Shulman says. "We credit that performance to several factors. First, we run a clean environment that minimizes the amount of dirt the vehicles are subjected to. Second is adherence to a strict planned maintenance program. And third are our operators. They are trained to run the vehicles properly and don't abuse equipment. Most of our Cat lift trucks have one operator per shift. This situation encourages taking better care of the unit. In fact, when one of our guys was assigned to a new Cat lift truck he tried to hide it so the operator on the next shift couldn't use it."

Weldbend has a strong relationship with its local Cat lift truck dealer.

"Our Cat lift truck dealer people are extremely good," James Jr. says. "They return calls right away. The owner is very accessible and savvy about the industry. We've used Cat lift trucks as long as we have because of the dependability of the equipment and the dealer's commitment to the lift truck industry. We get what we need with Cat lift trucks."

James Sr. adds, "We buy Cat lift trucks because they're a quality product; they're the best. We've had great success with them and have a good relationship with the lift truck dealer. Cat Lift Trucks builds a fine vehicle, and that's the truth." 




QUALITY IS AN ATTITUDE

James Sr. was in the coal mining business when he started Weldbend 53 years ago. The company bought and sold valves, fittings and pipefittings. Within a few years the operation focused on manufacturing welding fittings and flanges. Customers are distributors who sell the products to installers.

"When we started," Coulas says, "there were about 12 companies making both fittings and flanges and we were the upstart. Today we're the only one left."

Heading into his tenth decade, the elder Coulas is the first one to arrive at the office and is the last person to leave.

"There's nothing nicer than going to work," he says. "Like the saying goes, if you don't use it (your mind), you lose it, and it's true. I enjoy the challenge. Business is all about quality; there's nothing else. I have incorporated that attitude into our company." 



This GP30K Cat lift truck, the newest addition to Weldbend's fleet, moves one of the many loads of fittings.