

## Sharp Diversification Drives Sales

Precision Saw Works hunt for grinding opportunities.

By Debora Babin Katz

Frank Curran built Precision Saw Works from the ground up—literally. In 1985, he cut the trees down in his backyard for lumber and constructed a 5,600 sq. foot machine shop in Polkton, North Carolina. Curran has since expanded the business to include an additional 10,000 square foot building dedicated to blade welding, knife sharpening, and his main staple, carbide saw sharpening.



Frank Curran demonstrates his side grinders, including the MAXimum DS1200 (shown front left).

The choice to open a grinding shop was a calculated decision on Curran's part. The area is home to numerous primary saw mills. "I knew I wanted to have my own business and make money," said Curran, "and the location was ideal for sharpening." He admits he is a true believer that you need to love what you do for work, and "I love everything about grinding."

Curran also knew his company's survival would depend on his ability to diversify his services. "Carbide is our main stay, but we also do a lot of small band saw welding and knife sharpening," he said. Offering a number of services is how Curran says he is able to weather the current economic climate. "Service work is what we are holding

on to," he said. Curran builds saws of any kind, and it is this custom saw building and a full machine shop, which drives his sharpening business.

During Precision Saw Works first two years, Curran ran solo, then hired his first employee Mark Kendall, who is still with the company today. Now with 26 employees, Precision Saw Works is one of the largest band saw distributors in the Southeast. "My biggest challenge in this business has been finding good help," said Curran, "but I now have the best team of employees." Many have been with Curran for years, "some close to 20 years," he added. Although he has enough workers to handle every aspect of his day-to-day business, Curran still finds himself sharpening and running machines every week. "I think it's important for your em-

ployees to see that you are still willing to do the physical work," he said.

Curran is the face of sales for the company, and he spends a considerable amount of time out in the field generating new business. When he saw the first signs of a downturn in the economy, Curran says he made an

### Shop Snapshot

#### Company:

Precision Saw Works

#### Location:

Polkton, NC

#### Owner:

Frank Curran

#### Year of Inception:

1985

#### Business Mix:

Blade Welding  
Knife Sharpening  
Carbide Saw  
Sharpening

#### Tool Lines:

All major brands of band saws and circular saws.

#### Shop Size:

10,000 sq. feet  
5,600 sq. feet

#### Employees: 26

#### Key Grinding

**Equipment:** Six DS-1200 side grinders; LX8.5 small knife grinder; AP800 automatic facer; AL805 Automatic topper/facer; LA-500 circular knife grinder; MX-2000 knife grinder; UniMAX SR800 Steel Reliever; plus other equipment.

#### Favorite Pastime:

Hunting & Hot Rods

Precision Saw Works newer 10,000 sq. foot grinding shop (shown right).



The older shop (left) is primarily used for tool and cutter grinding.

executive decision to increase bids and the work load in anticipation of a negative change in the construction industry. His foresight also meant longer days for the team and more machinery purchases in order to deliver. "While other shops are struggling," he said, "my investment of time and money has paid off." Curran continues to buy machinery, which allows him to both diversify his services and run a more lean operation. Recently, Curran bought a MVM KS3600 knife grinder from Colonial Saw. "I needed this machine; it's a 12 foot knife grinder and it can handle our increasing volume of granulator knives and shear knives."

The first piece of machinery Curran purchased with Colonial Saw 18 years ago was an UTMA AL803 top grinder, and since then he has bought an AL804 and an AL805. "When I got the AL805 we were able to top and face all in one operation, which freed up some of my guys for other re-

sponsibilities." At Precision Saw Works, employees typically run three or more machines at a time. He has also invested in an UniMAX SR800 for steel relieving. "It streamlined my operations because I didn't have to manually steel relieve, which was a big savings in time and money," he said.

Curran stresses the importance of integrity in business. "It's a big deal to me that when a person tells me something, they do what they say," he said. "Colonial Saw delivers on what they say and it's this honesty that keeps me buying machinery from them, and working with Jeff Goltz [Colonial Saw's Southeast Applications & Sales Specialist]," said Curran.

What advice would Curran give to someone just starting out in the business? "Start off small and work your way up," said Curran, "because it's easy to get customers but hard to keep them, and if you can't deliver on what you promise, you won't make it."



**Frank Curran (right) meets with Jeff Goltz of Colonial Saw (left) at the recent IWF Atlanta Show to see the latest grinding technology including the UTMA AL805 shown here, which he has owned since 2006.**

How does Precision market its services today? "I advertise very little actually. I joined I.S.K.A. for the networking benefits, and I get a lot of my business through word of mouth." Many of his clients have been with Precision Saw Works since the day they opened their doors in 1985. "Some customers have closed down, but we have replaced them with new ones who have opened up," he said.

Curran's practical business sense and foresight has also helped him deal with another shop challenge—increasing fuel costs. His customer base is geographically spread out over large distances. "We go out as far as 200 miles for pick ups and deliveries," noted Curran. He took measures to minimize the impact of this on revenue. "I reviewed the driving distances for all my customers and calculated an average cost using the difference of what gas used to cost me

a gallon per mile to the current price per gallon, and then I came up with a flat fuel charge to all my customers regardless of their location for every delivery." It has helped considerably in offsetting this expense, he said.

When Curran is not working at the shop or out in the field networking for new grinding opportunities, he spends his free time with his family, and his other loves—hunting and hot rods. This year, he traveled West to Wyoming with friends to hunt turkeys. His most memorable trip was to Canada, taking a jumper plane that dropped him off to a remote area, to hunt for moose and bear. "It was so remote," says Curran, "that we were 52 miles from the nearest people, at an Indian reservation...I was in absolute heaven."



**Precision Saw Works Grinding Department includes the UniMAX SR800 Steel Reliever (front, right) and the UTMA AP800 Face Grinder.**



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