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Project managing for success

Millwork producer manages its projects effectively to serve its customers and manage its own resources.

By Karl D. Forth, Editor-in-Chief, kforth@wattnet.net



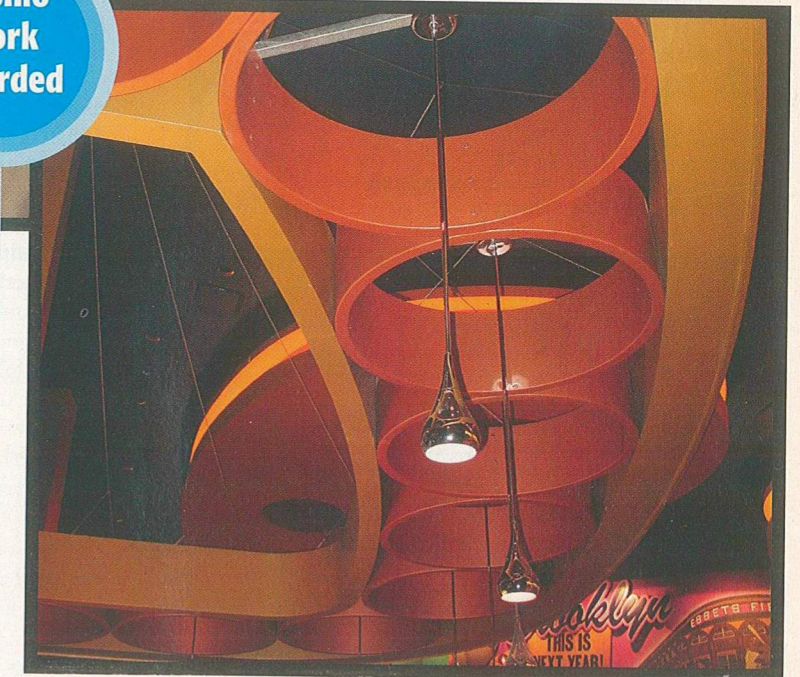
IIDA moulder allows Herrick & White to make its own mouldings.



Anderson Exxact Plus dual-table machining center cuts shaped parts such as curved mouldings.

Casino work awarded

Herrick & White earned an AWI Award of Excellence for its work at Junior's Restaurant at MGM Grand at Foxwoods, a casino and resort in Ledyard, Conn. Luaun, Duralam and other materials were used to make panels for the project, which included bars, booths, wait stations and lunch counters. A large canopy was made with kerfed Foamcore and spiral tubes from Shapes Unlimited. H&W is also certified for every AWI category.



Canopy for a bar at the MGM Grand at Foxwoods in Connecticut was part of a project recognized by AWI.

Project management is a key for Herrick & White, along with high-quality people who love the woodworking business and strive for perfection.

"Sometimes you can't be competitive in commercial markets when you're pushing such quality in residential markets," says Ken Bertram, H&W president. "Our people have to be trained about the projects and budgets we're working with," he says. "We've tried to satisfy our customers."

The Cumberland, R.I., company has 100 employees, including 50 in the shop, and makes high-end residential and commercial architectural millwork, mouldings, cabinets, doors and wood store fixtures. H&W has shifted from retail to primarily high-end residential, a market that is upscale enough to escape the effects of the current recession — so far.

"We are busy right now which is an accomplishment in this economy," Bertram says.

Today, probably 10 percent of business is retail, 20 percent is commercial and 70 percent is residential. A typical residential job may be about \$300,000, but the company has handled jobs as large as a \$3 million commercial project last year.

Ken Bertram is president and handles project management and Henry Gauthier supervises production. Steve Branigan is the controller, and Gary Rousseau handles sales and estimating.

Scheduling and databases

H&W uses Microsoft Project as a scheduling tool with an Access-based database developed in-house. That data comes

initially from estimating done in an Excel spreadsheet and then exported into Project and into Access. Everything is defined in the Access program, including parts to be ordered and time to be spent on each job.

"The project manager lays out his schedule in Project," Bertram says. "Once he does that, he exports that information from Project into Access. That helps create the shop orders, and sets the schedule."

"I can look at the future workloads, look at what the CNC machine or fabrication will be doing. It takes the number of people we have multiplied by the number of hours per week, determines our total capacity and compares it to hours we're projecting, coming from MS Project."

In addition to AutoCAD, H&W also uses ProEngineer software to provide three-dimensional views. ProEngi-

Plant Facts

Herrick & White Ltd.
Cumberland, R.I.

Employees: 100

Products: High-end residential and commercial mouldings, cabinets, doors and wood store fixtures.

Annual sales: \$12.5 million

Plant size: 65,000 square feet

www.Herrick-white.com

neer can also be fed into H&W's Access program.

Bertram says that changes in ongoing projects can easily be made. For example, if drawings have not been approved by the customer, he can expand the overall schedule.

"It allows us to keep our manufacturing planning up-to-date," he says. "We're addressing schedule changes sooner in the process. That includes lead times for materials."

If workflow is uneven, the production scheduler will try to level that work out. "It allows us to maneuver and level our capacity," Bertram says.

H&W can also track profitability of each job while it is in progress, and of the company as a whole. A list of jobs in progress with the bid amount and how much has been spent to do the work so far helps identify problems before they are too late to correct.

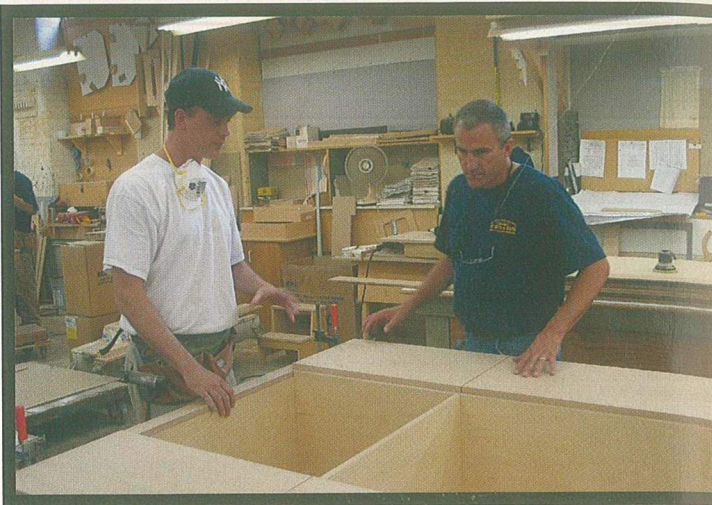
"We can compare labor on any specific manufacturing order, plus our material budgets. That gives us a more specific version of how we're progressing on a job."

The project managers can check the status of each job. In

North Pole Toy Co.

Herrick & White's North Pole Toy Co. is a volunteer effort to make toys for needy kids at Christmas. Children of employees come into the shop for a special day to help paint and decorate the toys. The Woonsocket Police Dept. recognized this effort.

continued



Project management has helped Herrick & White handle a variety of residential projects.

good idea that our cash flow is keeping up with our costs," he says.

"I only get scared when the expense number begins to exceed the amount billed," Bertram says. "If we sold a job for \$63,000, have recorded \$57,000 in costs but have only billed \$33,000, that's a problem. So the project manager needs to look at this billing versus cost report every month.

Cross training evens out workloads

A good way to even workloads is through cross training. A number of new jobs at one time can cause a bottleneck in engineering, and later in the shop.

"We take some of our senior people and train them internally in Access and AutoCAD," Bertram says.

"Now we have half-dozen people who can work in either engineering or the shop. As engineering becomes busy and manufacturing slows, we bring them to engineering and they can help there.

"In some cases it works out well because they know what's happening up front. They've worked on the engineering aspect on some of the projects that are in the shop."

Access to cutting

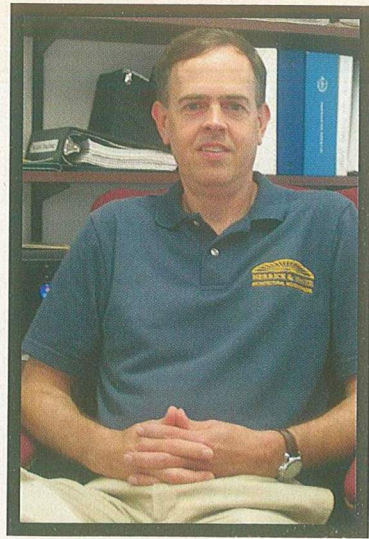
Gauthier says that H&W used to get architectural drawings that were perfect. Now, they have to do much more design-and-build, and they're much more involved in the design process.

H&W has always owned and maintained its own equipment, Gauthier says, often for the long haul. They've also had a longtime relationship with Boshco Inc., a Massachusetts equipment distributor.

Data goes from the Access database previously described into Pattern Systems, then into a Schelling panel saw that does most of the cutting. A Paolini sliding table saw was added to allow flexibility at the start of the process. H&W also bought several SawStop table saws, primarily for safety.

An IMA Bima point-to-point is used mostly for boring. An Anderson Exxact Plus dual-table machining center cuts shaped parts such as curved mouldings. Also here are an

Herrick & White's Ken Bertram oversees the project management for the millwork company.



IMA edgebander with Thomas return table, Raimann gang rip saw, IIDA six-head Millennium moulder, and HolyTek resaw machine that cuts boards into thin pieces so they can be bent.

The machining and mill area uses mostly older machines, including an Oliver jointer still in action and four shapers. H&W also grinds their own moulder knives in a well-organized area.

Upstairs in the two-story building, a finishing department has five finishing booths. H&W can do their own color and stain matching.

Looking at bids and sales

Business was good in 2008 and in early 2009, but the economic slowdown has put expansion plans on hold.

"With the present economic conditions, I'm feeling more need to pay attention to our sales," Bertram says. "We've always had a good backlog. We've had a 30-50 percent hit rate on a lot of jobs that are bid, that's pretty good.

Customers are sending us jobs, we're bidding them and getting them. So I'm implementing another database that will allow us to track the probability that we'll win awards and reasons for losing jobs. And we want to know who our competitors are for that job.

"We're trying to remain flexible, so we're going where the work is, but that means dealing with different quality levels." ●

For more info

Anderson America, Exxact machining center
www.andersonamerica.com 704.522.1823

Atlantic Machinery Corp., Paolini sliding table saw
www.atlanticmach.com 860.354.7200

Boshco Inc., Table saws, woodworking equipment
www.boshco.com 978.667.1911

HolyTek, Resaw machine
www.holytek.com.tw

IMA/Schelling, Schelling panel saw, IMA Bima point-to-point, IMA edgebander
www.imaamerica.com 919.246.0350 www.schelling.com 919-544-0430

Pruitt Machinery Inc., IIDA moulder
www.pruittmachinery.com 828.328.2641

SawStop LLC, Table saws
www.sawstop.com 503-570-3200

20-20 Pattern Systems Intl., Software
www.patternsystems.com 973.770.3800

Weinig Group, Raimann gang rip saw
www.weinigusa.com 704.799.0100

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