



Crum Manufacturing of Waterville marked its 35th anniversary and 3,500 work days with no lost time during an April 19 celebration.

MIRROR PHOTOS BY KAREN GERHARDINGER



Juan L. Rodriguez (left), director of automation, and Kyle Heitmeyer, automation controls engineer, program Universal cobots at Crum Manufacturing.

Crum Manufacturing Marks 35th Anniversary, 3,500 Work Days With No Lost Time

BY KAREN GERHARDINGER
MIRROR REPORTER

With a variety of grippers and tools, the robots at Crum Manufacturing can hold onto just about everything — except maybe a juicy barbecue sandwich.

The smell of barbecue, however, was in the air on April 19 as Crum’s 40 employees feasted, played corn hole and enjoyed neck massages during the Waterville company’s 35th anniversary celebration.

As owner and CEO Doug Waldie reflected on the changes in the past decade, he couldn’t help but smile. While the company took a hit in 2009 and was reduced to just 15 employees, a 20,000-square-foot expansion in 2013 has spurred steady growth.

“We have quickly moved forward in the last five years, adding automation. When

the automotive industry slowed, we were slow. We knew we needed to diversify,” Waldie said. “Now we have non-automotive customers. As the automotive industry fluctuates, we stay strong.”

On the clean manufacturing floor, robots are increasingly used to meet customer demands, from assembling parts to picking, packing and palletizing products.

Juan L. Rodriguez, director of automation, recently pulled out his phone to show a video of a cobot — a collaborative robot — that applies a sealant to a freezer door that is being assembled by two employees. Crum utilizes Fanuc robots, which are typically behind cages, and Universal cobots, which work alongside people.

“Everybody wants automation right now for four main reasons: the labor shortage, ergonomics, quality and faster production time,”

he said.

A Universal robot picks up a bracket and moves it through the process of inserting and sealing grommets into place. An infrared line checks the quality of the part and kicks out the rejects.

“All the employee needs to do is feed the hopper,” Rodriguez said.

Last month, Crum was featured in Industrial Machinery Digest for its work with T&W Stamping. The Youngstown-based company wanted to automate one of the most labor-intensive parts of its metal fabrication process — the tending of resistive welders.

Using cobots to tend these welders was pretty much unheard of in the industry, Rodriguez said. Crum custom-made end-of-arm tooling to overcome several obstacles. The cost was much lower than expected, yet the result was a 40-percent increase in efficiency, and the operator who used to spend his time performing manual welds now focuses on programming the robot.

While the robots are taking some of the work off of employees, Crum has hired 10 new people in the past five years to program and tend to the robots. As a result, Crum can now handle five to six major jobs at once, Waldie said.

“We’ve been able to find solutions for our existing customers and pick up some new ones,” he said.

In the next year, Waldie said Crum will change the name to Crum Engineering.

“Everyone knows we’re an engineering company,” he said. “A new name will be helpful in bringing in new customers.”

Joining the celebration last week was founder Ernest Crum Jr. and his wife, Helen.

“We are blessed. I’m amazed at how much is getting done,” he said.

Ernest and his father started the company in 1984 in a Toledo garage, with a mission to quickly manufacture and supply the rubber hose industry with precision-formed mandrels. These are tool components used in anything

from washing machines and tractors to automobiles.

Ernest and Helen’s daughter, Debbie Waldie, used to help out on the venture. Now, she is owner and CFO.

Ernest credits Debbie and Doug with empowering employees and leading the company through steady growth.

With profit-sharing and open lines of communication, employees more readily speak up with ideas for improvements, and focus on keeping the workplace safe.

“They’re very focused on their work. It helps reduce lost time and focus on doing

it right,” Helen said. A retired nursing director, Helen also applauds the inclusion of medical supply kits at each station.

That focus on safety has paid off. On April 15, Crum marked 3,500 workdays, or 14 years, without a lost-time incident, said Ryan Waldie, administrative services coordinator.

“A lost-time incident is something that results in a fatality, permanent disability or time lost from work for even a minor injury,” he said. “Crum Manufacturing takes great pride in providing a safe work environment and we

couldn’t be more proud of the safe work practices maintained and followed each day by our entire team.”

Billy McGilvery, a 30-year employee who leads the bending area, has never lost time due to injury, even though his task of custom-bending is the most physical job in the company.

“We learn to work smarter. You don’t try to push yourself. And there are things you learn from experience that you don’t try to bend — there are tools for that,” he said.

For more information, visit www.crummfg.com.

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