

Behind the Scenes

with Kurt Hertzog



Oneway Manufacturing Company

There probably isn't a woodturner who doesn't recognize the name "Oneway." The Oneway Manufacturing Company has a line of woodturning products that ranges from lathes to sharpening systems. Located on a quiet street in Stratford, Ontario, Canada, the common belief is that it is much larger than it actually is. You might be surprised by the road that led to this company's beginning.

Oneway, the woodturning lathe company, is essentially a small portion of a contract machine shop. The parent company, Perth Precision, is a family-run business specializing in special-purpose, limited-volume machining jobs. Founded by Tim Clay, it ventured into the woodturning equipment business quite by chance.

Tim Clay had some woodworking experience, but had never tried woodturning. His woodworking background was that of producing wooden truck bodies for the salt herring trade. When he became interested in woodturning, he needed to shop for some work-holding accessories. Having a metalworking background, his interest was in the metalworking-style chucks, rather than faceplates, for example. Twenty years ago, his local retailer only had the Nova chuck to offer, and it was so difficult to get a timely delivery of the chuck that the dealer asked Tim if the machine shop could make chucks for him to sell.

Being a contract machine shop, Tim took on the task and the company produced fifty chucks for the dealer. When these were completed for delivery, the dealer had just received his Nova chucks and he no longer needed the ones from Tim. Those fifty chucks that the machine shop now owned and needed to sell spawned the company known today as Oneway.

With the fifty chucks in hand, the Clays took a booth at a local woodshow. From that first show in Brantford twenty years ago, the Oneway Manufacturing Company developed a product line that covers most every facet of the woodturning business—from tools and sharpening to lathes and accessories. The decision to name the company Oneway is attributed to the fact that *free advertising* is constantly available on the side of every rental truck and many street signs everywhere in the world!

From the distinctive cream-colored powder paint coating on its products to the unique tube body on the lathe, the Oneway products are easily identified.

Mistakenly credited as the product of a much larger company, the Perth Precision Company (and therefore Oneway) employs about forty-five people with sales of six million per year. That is its contract machining business. Oneway is a marketing entity within that operation and there is no physical distinction within the walls. Since the lathe product line was developed fifteen years ago, nearly 3,000 are out in the field with about 300 produced each year.

When I visited in October 2010, the company was in the throes of moving from its current location to a new, much larger building. The move was being done on the fly without the luxury of shutting down any of the operations or interrupting production; that is quite an undertaking. By the time you read this, the company will have moved to its new location. The new site offers plenty of space for the current operations with room for growth. Currently, part of the new building is being leased out until the company's own operations require the space. Even though it has been, and is, continually growing, they still keep it a "small family" business. If you call, you are likely to have the phone answered directly by one of the Clay family, and if not, you'll be able to speak to one of them just by asking.



Fig. 1. The Oneway Manufacturing Company is located on a quiet street in Stratford, Ontario, Canada.



Fig. 2. Kevin Clay, the son of founder Tim Clay, works at the family business, as do his mother and sisters.



Fig. 5. Typical to most machining companies, laser-cutting operations are widely used because of their versatility.



Fig. 3. Oneway Manufacturing is really a marketing operation of Perth Precision, a contract machining company.



Fig. 6. Robotic welding is a key process in the fabrication of the Oneway tube construction lathes and is much of their contract work.

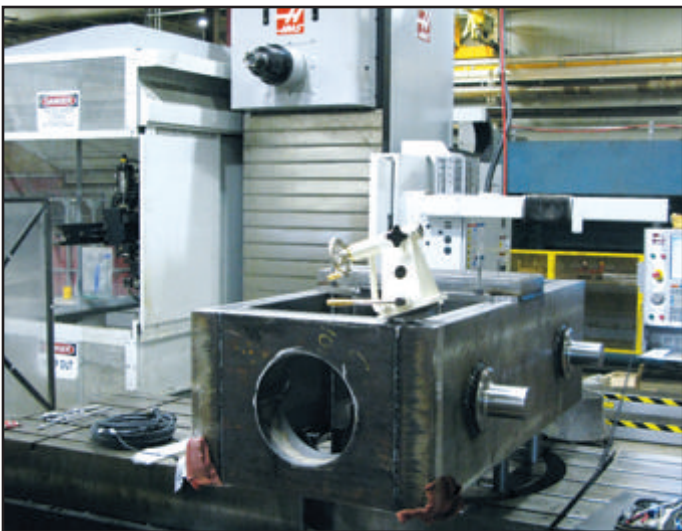


Fig. 4. As a contract machining company, the work ranges from the Oneway product line to some fairly large, very specialized parts.



Fig. 7. The Oneway products needing powder paint coating are completed on-site.



Fig. 8. As a small family-operated company, whatever job needs doing gets done. Here Cindy Clay gets the trash taken out.



Fig. 11. Each lathe is built to order and the final assembly has already been moved to the new facility.



Fig. 9. Guess what these steel tubes will ultimately turn into?



Fig. 12. This is only a partial look at the expansive building that will house the Oneway Manufacturing Company and Perth Precision.



Fig. 10. The new building is already being set up to do fulfillment of accessory orders.



Fig. 13. This photo shows the range of scale of the designs and processing of the projects that cross Kevin's desk.