

# ONE AT A TIME

## A metal company stays relevant after 88 years of custom orders

BY CAITLIN TUCKER

**O**n May 25, 1925, the cover of *Time* displayed the portrait of legendary inventor Thomas Alva Edison. Innovation and innovators splattered the pages within, from the buzz of aeronautics and building businesses to a profile of Alden L. Putnam and his balloon tires for automobiles.

Vol. V No. 21 of *Time* reflected the progress and inventiveness of industry leaders seen throughout the United States in 1925.

That same year in the industrial city of Youngstown, Ohio, the small steel brokerage firm Hynes Steel Products Co. established itself as an innovative company committed to quality and service. More than eight decades later, Hynes Industries has evolved into a steel service center and



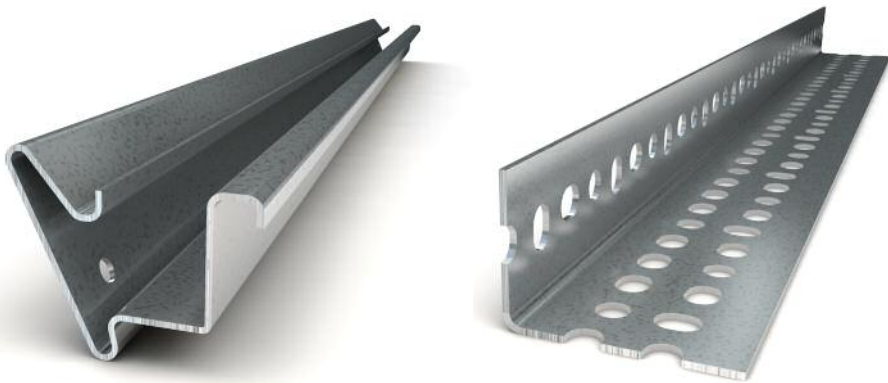
products group offering custom roll-formed and standard roll-formed shapes, slit coil and strip steel products, slotted angle, specialty wire and flat wire shapes.

“Hynes was founded with our sheet steel products group back in 1925 and then further associations through that supply chain identified the need to offer additional value-added services, so we branched off into our roll forming group,” says Mike Giambattista, vice president of marketing and sales. “From there we take the sheet steel coils that our service center slits and process them into custom roll-formed shapes. We go from a slit coil directly to a custom part in one continuous forming operation.”

According to Giambattista, recognizing customer needs in the marketplace and responding with investment in capital equipment have been drivers of success for Hynes. “The more we can help our cus-



Approximately 40,000 master coils being slit into smaller-width slit coils.



**From left: A roll-formed part for the transportation industry, a part for the appliance industry and a FlexAngle slotted angle.**

tomers with costs, the more they can be competitive in their markets and the more it's a win-win relationship," he says. "I think what we've done over the years is we've had a good defined strategic plan, identified areas to consistently improve on and we've executed the plan."

### **A hand in everything**

In addition to the roll-formed products group, Giambattista says, "A very unique competitive advantage would be that we have a steel service center right on site."

The service center purchases materials directly from producing steel mills and stocks on average 36 million pounds of steel. "Being a custom roll former and having a supply chain that goes directly back to the producing steel mill is a tremendous advantage," he continues. "We've streamlined the cost structure from the producing mill to our end users. And having access to 36 million pounds of steel increases our ability to respond to emergencies."

Working directly with the mill source also enables Hynes to manipulate elements such as gauge consistency, chemistry and yields to produce the type of product that benefits the entire process.

"We've taken out all the middle men along the way," says Giambattista. The service center sells slit coil and strip steel to furnishing and fixtures groups and metal stamping companies. "The biggest end user application would be metal service centers themselves, who buy it in large quantities and redistribute it in smaller quantities to end users," he says.

"On the roll form side, we take slit coil, and roll form it into finished parts that OEMs use to assemble into their products," he continues. Hynes supplies structural shapes to the truck trailer and

transportation industry. In addition, the company works in the alternative energy, lawn and garden equipment, building materials, and appliance industries. "General Electric Appliances was our first roll form customer back in the 1930s, and they're still a customer today," says Giambattista. "I think that speaks to the cornerstones of what we built the company on and that's quality, service and on-time deliveries."

### **Working with customers**

Like any business that's been around for more than half a century, Hynes relies on customer input to drive its modernization. "All markets and all customers have their own special requirements and systems that they model their point of assembly to," says Giambattista. "And even the same customers over the years have evolved to using different processes, so we supply many parts on a just-in-time basis directly to the point of assembly.

"We have the ability to customize our supply programs to serve the needs of our customers. We don't just try to say, 'Here's the Hynes way, make this fit in your system,'" he continues. "We listen to our customers and ask, 'What are your specific needs, and then what can we do to assist you in those areas?' So whether it's different packaging, a different shipping method, a different rolling schedule, we remain flexible to serve those needs."

The customer relationship begins with an OEM and a part drawing that needs to be manufactured. Hynes' engineering team then provides design assistance to establish the most cost-effective solution based on the customer's needs.

"Essentially we get involved and make suggestions on gauge or product design to identify the most functional part design

possible using the least amount of material, or maybe [add] value to the product by punching holes inline," says Giambattista. "So we look to add value to the part we're manufacturing, to eliminate secondary handling and processing downstream." This process can be as simple as supplying 6-foot lengths to someone who previously purchased 20-foot-long parts that were cut down to 6 feet at their own facility. "Other manners may be eliminating a secondary press brake operation to install holes or slots when we can punch that inline. Our goal is to supply completely fabricated parts ready for assembly."

According to Giambattista, Hynes performs a lot of inline punching and programmable servo feeds. Compared to a mechanical feed where material is fed at the same length intervals, with a servo feed the feed length varies. "Now you can program the material feed to 6 inches, then 5.8 inches and then 9.3 inches," explains Giambattista. "We also utilize programmable gauged punching dies that call in and call out different punches inline in a continuous operation along with the programmed feed length to install features exactly where you need them," he continues. "That's created extreme flexibility for our end users to put holes and slots in various locations on the same part and change that pattern many times over." For one trailer customer, Hynes produces more than 300 variations within one family of parts.

### **Keeping up**

"You have to be creative and keep adapting to the marketplace. We try to listen to our customers and potential customers, and we're always doing a lot of self-assessment on what we're doing and how it's being received," says Giambattista. Because of the economic crisis, many metal companies were forced to become creative and explore

new markets, a large one being alternative energy. Solar in particular requires a significant use of metal. From a roll forming standpoint, Giambattista says the biggest hurdle to breaking into any market is the cost of tooling needed to produce that new custom shape.

“Custom roll form tooling can run anywhere from \$30,000 up to \$100,000, depending on the section, and [possible] requirement of prepunch dies for installing holes and notches,” he says. In this situation, Hynes has a few options: It can invest into the program with its customer and absorb some of the tooling cost or it can amortize the tool cost to the customer into the piece price over a certain amount of parts or time. Rebate programs also are an option. “I think you have to be creative in today’s day and age to try to ease the initial burden of the tool cost,” says Giambattista.

Among Thomas Edison and others worthy of that 1925 issue of *Time*, the founders of Hynes Industries recognized an important element of successful business:



**These slit coils are being used on some of Hynes’ 38 roll forming lines.**

innovation. The ability to adapt to changing customer needs, develop creative design solutions and invest in new equipment has kept Hynes relevant in 2013. “I have to speak to the results, as well,” says Giambattista. “It’s enjoyable to look at a truck going down the street and say, ‘Hey, they’re using some of our parts.’ And that speaks true for all of our employees at Hynes,” he contin-

ues. “We help them associate with our customers’ end products and take pride in what they’ve done to contribute to the success of other companies.” ■

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