

feature **FABRICATING/FORMATING**

# Laicor checks out productivity improvements with **new press brake**

**In** 1974 Andy Laitila was in his early 20's living in his native Finland when he and his wife planned a two-year visit to Canada. This "two-year visit" soon became a life-changing adventure. Laitila fell in love with Canada and soon adopted the country for his new home, raised a family, and founded Laicor Fixtures, a manufacturer of retail checkout counters and cabinets based in Peterborough, ON.

Prior to founding Laicor Fixtures, Laitila was president of a leading checkout counter manufacturer from 1979 to 1994. Under Laitila's stewardship, the firm grew from a four-person start-up company to become one of North America's largest checkout counter manufacturers.

Laitila's experience in the checkout industry would prove valuable when he founded Laicor in 1996 as a contract manufacturer fabricating stainless steel components for larger companies. In 1999, Laicor entered the checkout market.

Initially, Laicor's fabrication equipment consisted of a single-station mechanical punch press, a shear, a press brake, and other basic machinery. As the company grew, they added equipment to keep up with the growing production. But the most dramatic purchase took place in 2005 with the acquisition of the Finn-Power Shear Genius flexible manufactur-

ing cell. The Shear Genius is a combination turret punch press and right angle shear. In its product lines, Laicor fabricates galvanized, stainless steel, and aluminum in multiple thicknesses from 20 to 11 gauge.

The impact of the Shear Genius was quickly apparent at Laicor. "We went from old machines and old production styles to a more modern and faster method," explains Laitila. "The Shear Genius more than doubled our productivity." According to Mika Laitila, manager, engineering and design, other benefits of the Shear Genius include high versatility and accuracy. "We run very low lots," explains Mika. "With the Finn-Power Shear Genius and NC Express software, we are able to run dynamic nests. You will not see the same nests numbers going through the Shear Genius twice. It's always different quantities, different lengths, and orders intermingled. Because the clamps hold the sheet for both punching and shearing, the parts have higher accuracy. We were able to nearly double our productivity on our older hydraulic press brake because the parts are now continually being produced on dimension."

Later, Laicor decided to upgrade an older existing press brake and subsequently selected the Finn-Power E Series servo-electric 80-ton press brake.

The E Series press brake is a fast, accurate bending solution. "The high accuracy combination of both the E press brake and the Shear Genius cell further increased our productivity," says Laitila. "The press brake operator can trust the drawings and doesn't have to measure everything because he knows the parts will be accurate. There are also downstream benefits for us. About half of our shop is assembly. We have holes on every part, so if the bend is off 1/16 in. we could have major problems. However, the accuracy of the E brake is phenomenal. Our accuracy on the E brake is within .003-.004 in. on every part."

Another feature of the E brake—the Wila Quick-Change Tooling System—also offered important benefits. Laicor's first employee and long-time press brake operator/programmer Robert Dickson had developed carpal tunnel syndrome in a wrist and elbow from changing tooling on the older hydraulic press brake. "The tooling had to be cranked on and off with a wrench," explains Dickson. "We're a short run shop and it's not unusual for us to make up to 150 setups per day. The E press brake has Wila Quick-Change Tooling which is much easier." The E brake has performed especially well on the many short runs that Laicor undertakes. "The E brake is unbeatable on small runs," says Dickson.



The Finn-Power E Series press brake performs especially well on the many short production runs that Laicor undertakes.

Laicor takes pride in its products' unique modern styling, quality, and design flexibility. "We customize our products to customer needs," says Laitila. "This approach to the market demands our quick response time and the ability to change quickly. The Finn-Power Shear Genius and E brake have greatly helped us in this challenge."

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