

# 5 minutes with an AERA Member

## Scott Wichlacz, Manitowoc Motor Machining

The AERA board of directors suggested we create a column that would introduce fellow members and allow them to share ideas about our industry with *Engine Professional* subscribers. Other associations do the same and you will find similar columns in other trade publications. Without question, I feel strongly that hearing from peers often about their trials and tribulations can help one with their own issues. Hearing other professional's views on common subjects can also help one with insight into these subjects. We hope this column will help you and your business in some way that might not have happened if you hadn't been an *Engine Professional* subscriber. Our industry is full of many creative, independent, hard working and successful people. Let's spend five minutes with them and hopefully learn something that will help you and your business.

Our first person to interview is no stranger to our industry. Scott Wichlacz is the owner operator of Manitowoc Motor Machining and Parts, Inc. in Manitowoc, Wisconsin. He is also a past Chairman of the Board for AERA who is a great success story, starting his shop on his own in July 1985. Scott was educated as an auto mechanic because that is what the local technical school had to offer. But Scott's interests were in engine building and he headed down that path immediately, even while he was in school. He started doing headwork and boring cylinders in his garage. After seeing no room for advancement at a local jobber shop, he went to an accountant who helped him with a business plan and then to a bank for a loan which provided the financing needed to open his own shop.

**EP** What type of work do you perform currently at Manitowoc Motor Machining?

**SW** I would say 50% of our work is agricultural/industrial and heavy duty engines. The other 50% of our work comes from everyday automotive and high-performance work; hydraulic hose and tube work, starters, generators and alternators, as well as a fair amount of custom machine work in parts.

**EP** Do you perform any specific niche jobs?

**SW** Yes, we have become known to many customers for our work on John Deere two cylinder full round main bearing rebuilds. We have the full round bearings cast for us at a local foundry and we do all of the machining here along with assembly. This has been a nice niche for us; we see blocks from all over the country and some international work as well.

**EP** Typically, how large of a geographical area do you cover.

**SW** Routinely, I would say we do a good job covering 250 miles outside of Manitowoc. However, I would say that 75% of our work is within 100 miles. But we have done work nationally and internationally too.

**EP** How important do you feel an internet presence is to your shop?

**SW** I feel strongly that our website has helped us tremendously. Showing customers our shop both inside and out with actual pictures of our equipment has gained us a lot of credibility. Customers can see our commitment to this industry. They can see we are a real business who performs the work. We do list some stuff on E-Bay but mostly to get attention and entice someone to call and this has worked.

**EP** Have you ventured out into any other business opportunities?

**SW** Yes, several years ago I bought 50% ownership into Jim Backus' Mack Equipment Sales. I travel one day a week and call on shops selling new and used equipment and find it very rewarding. I can help a lot of people with my knowledge and experience in the industry and it is part of my succession plan. It allows my employees the opportunity to run Manitowoc Motor Machining when I'm gone. It is my plan to sell them that business in time when retirement comes calling.

**EP** What is the most important AERA member benefit from your perspective?

**SW** Easily, it has been the networking that AERA has allowed me to do. Attending AERA functions and trade shows has given me the opportunity to gain many friends and colleagues. These relationships have helped me tremendously both in business and in life. Secondly, I would have to say PRO-SIS, AERA's engine specification software. We use this information daily.

**EP** What is your best piece of advice for shops in our industry?

**SW** Track your time on every job because you need to be paid for it. Understand your cost per man hour so you can charge correctly. Keep up on today's technology and invest in your business with equipment and training. This is a great industry and the strong will not only survive but thrive.

**EP** Scott Wichlacz can be reached via email at [motorm@lakefield.net](mailto:motorm@lakefield.net) or phone 920-684-8577. ■