

TOOL & MANUFACTURING

A PREMIUM FIT FOR 40 YEARS



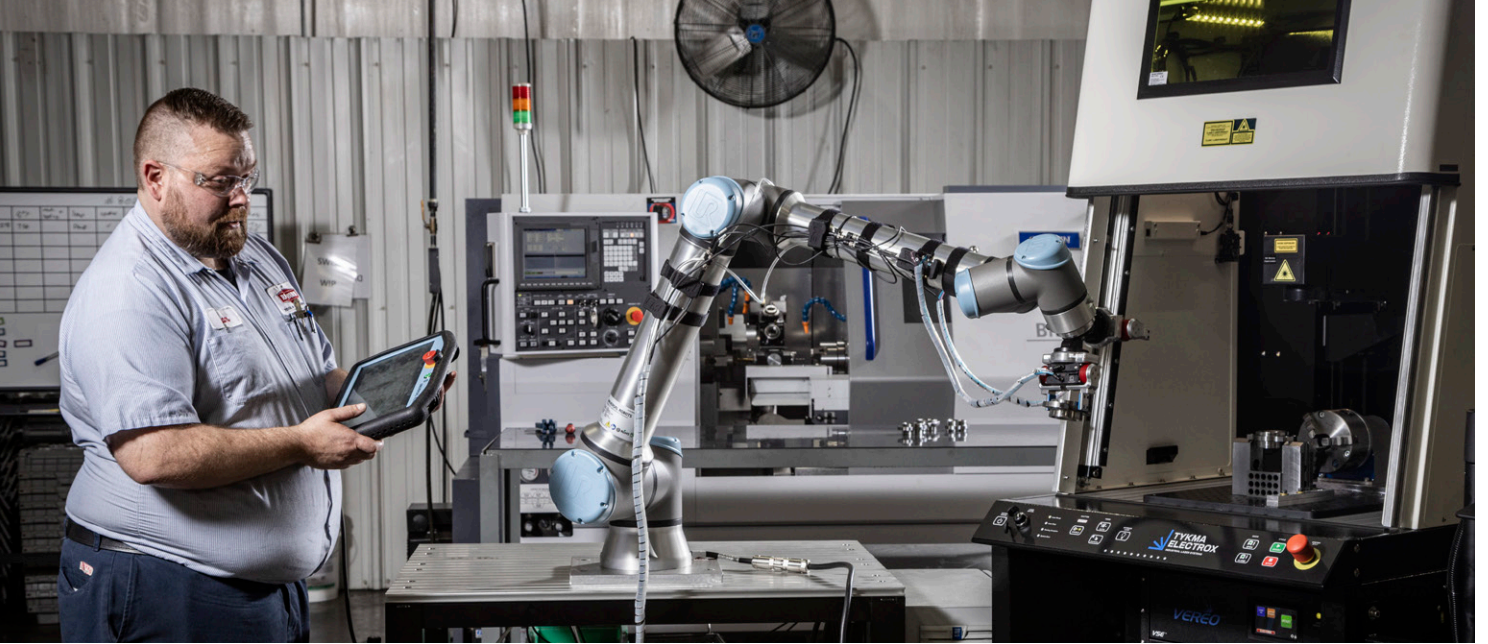
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Following COVID-19, supply chain issues made North America and the rest of the world realize the dangers of exporting fabrication. As a result, premium prototype-to-production, with the latest in computer numerical control (CNC) machining services, done on home soil has become sought after, and offers opportunity for local fabrication companies and the local economies that depend on their success.



Written by Pauline Müller

Rathburn Tool & Manufacturing in Auburn, Indiana fabricates metal components for assembly leaders in industries like equipment builders in construction and train fabrication, audio visual systems, large truck clutch systems, paintball markers, fire safety equipment, utility trailers, and many more. The company is celebrating its 40th anniversary this year, noting not just a remarkable run in the industry, but also its long history of delivering precision manufactured parts companies have come to know and trust. ▶▶



▶ “Rathburn Tool & Manufacturing was delivering precision parts for our customers years before there was any labor shortage or supply chain issues,” says Angie Holt, Rathburn’s President and Chief Executive Officer. “We focused on helping our customers get the pieces they needed at quality levels and prices that helped them win. We weren’t thinking of competing with manufacturers overseas. We just wanted to do what was right for our customers, every day.”

By focusing on quality at home, Rathburn Tool has been able to recognize steady growth and performance through the years. Holt continues, “It is exciting to make components that drive the world in many ways—things that you see every day, things that make the world work and help our customers thrive.”

Helping the company’s customers thrive has not gone unnoticed. Last year, the DeKalb County Chamber of Commerce crowned Rathburn Tool & Manufacturing Business of the Year and the Indiana Manufacturer’s Association recognized Rathburn’s outstanding work with a Manufacturing Excellence award. In addition, the company reports an upswing in both volume and diversity of business in the wake of a return of manufacturing to local shores.

With this diversification of its customer base, Rathburn Tool & Manufacturing continues to grow as a trusted go-to service provider providing solutions and improving customers’ processes.

According to Angie Holt, Rathburn’s longevity is due in part to its personal care, detail-oriented service, and continuous process improvement. She adds, “Our approach is relational, not transactional,” as she discusses what sets Rathburn apart in the industry. “For example, Brian Cole, our Engineering Manager, leads our efforts to understand the form and function of the part and the bigger application within the larger assembly. So, instead of just taking orders, we look at the greater need and work with our customers to ensure they get

the parts that work best—even as their tooling and machining have evolved over time.”

To provide customers with the best precision parts and service, the company has committed itself to continuous improvement. The company has welcomed the aerospace and defense industries as customers, so to accommodate their standards, Rathburn pursued and received AS9100D certification, in addition to its longstanding ISO 9001 and IATF 16949 quality management system. The company is also NIST-compliant, another layer to its quality management system from the National Institute of Standards and Technology required for the protection of data used by the government and its contractors. Further, state-of-the-art laser etching allows the company to offer serialization and traceability.

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Rathburn has always focused on having great equipment to enable it to produce precision parts. In addition to traditional mills and lathes, Rathburn’s capabilities are further enhanced by Swiss machining equipment precision, multi-spindle machining, custom automation, and ‘cobots’—or collaborative robots.

Engineering Manager, Brian Cole, explains that having the newest cobot provides more than just another machine doing a job. “Cobots allow a person to work beside it instead of needing it to be isolated from the human contact. They improve productivity, offer excellent flexibility, and greatly improve the use of space,” he shares. ▶▶

From all of us at Millennium Machinery and MCC, we would like to congratulate Rathburn Tool & Manufacturing on **40 years** of growth and success in business!



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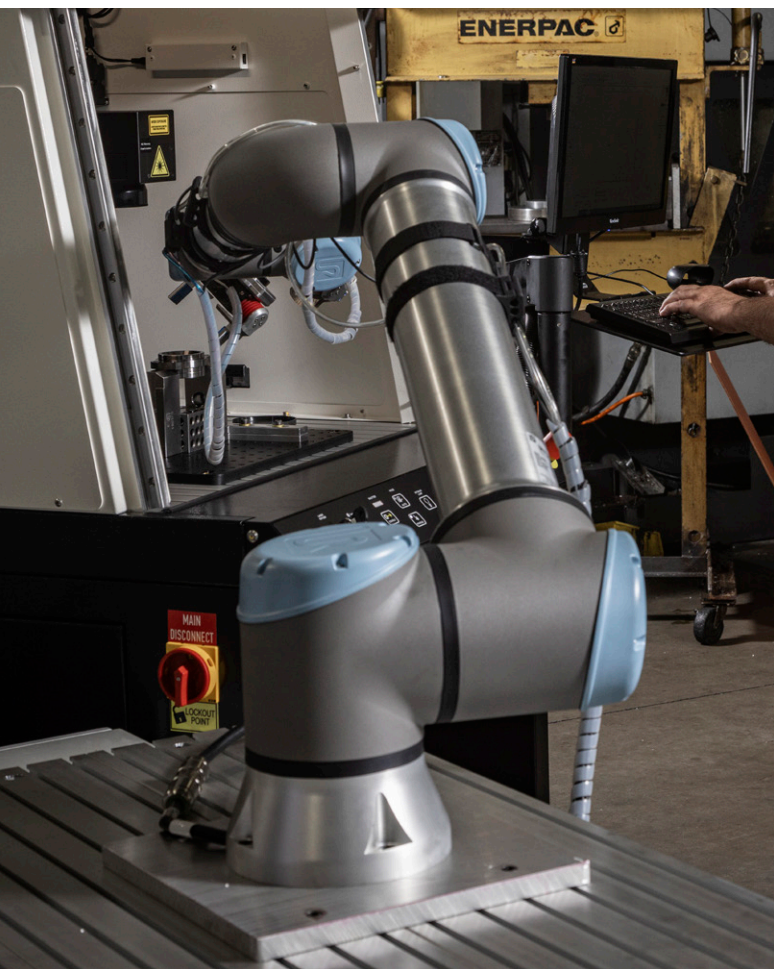
▶ “We installed the first robot in 2016, to take over a repetitive job that was hard on the people running it,” Cole adds. “It was a lot of stress on the employees, so we incorporated the robot to take that stress off them.” The first installation was followed by another three robots to take over repetitive tasks and improve working conditions.

Company founder Jerry Rathburn notes, “For forty years, we strived to make the employee or the person on the floor’s job as easy as possible... to get the best possible quality. But the idea is not to work somebody hard when they come here every day. We work smarter and let the machines do the work and let the employee monitor the machines.”



Angie Holt adds, “We let people do what people do best: maintain quality, change tools, identify issues, troubleshoot, et cetera, and then let the robot or cobot do the repetitive work—loading and unloading particularly.” The best part, Cole points out, is that employees are happy to return to the job every morning which, of course, goes a long way to retaining staff.

People are a big reason for Rathburn’s continued success in the marketplace. For many, it’s not just about crafting the parts, it’s solving problems and putting puzzles together. Brian Cole notes, “The neatest thing about working in a machine shop is that they give you a chunk of steel, and then you have to remove enough material to find the part within that chunk of steel. And for us some of those parts may show up on a bus in Germany or a railway car in Siberia.”



“The company is particularly pleased with its contribution toward establishing an advanced manufacturing program for its local school district as part of a collective initiative with several small area fabricators.”

This commitment to the team’s well-being is visible in staff tenure. The company has benefitted from more than 30 seasoned industry experts on staff to help guide Rathburn through the economic storm of the last three years. It isn’t unusual for Rathburn employees to boast of being with the company for five years or more. One notched their fifteenth year with the company and another has been at Rathburn for more than 30 years.

The company’s leaders work to cement the true meaning of being a family business into every aspect of the operation. This effort includes education, support, and even establishing a community garden available to employees that also helps feed those at Auburn’s local women’s shelter.

Non-participants can also obtain produce for a donation to the town's Veteran Endowment Fund, which the company was instrumental in setting up.

Staff members participate in fun runs/walks alongside their loved ones as well as health challenges. Lastly, and certainly not least, Rathburn Tool & Manufacturing offers its people a top benefits package known to outshine those of larger firms. The company is particularly pleased with its contribution toward establishing an advanced manufacturing program for its local school district as part of a collective initiative with several small area fabricators. The company will welcome the first group of interns during the 2023-24 school year with great joy at the possibilities that await these young trailblazers.

Holt is visibly proud of how her team has made such a palpable difference in the company, the community, and the region. "Our team takes pride in their work and care about the product we turn out every day," she says. "We do what it takes to get the job done and we go above and beyond to understand and deliver exactly what our customers require, as well as share our knowledge to help our customers thrive."

While the company has been an indelible part of her life since childhood, Holt officially joined the firm five years ago. As an engineering graduate with two decades of experience in the commercial construction industry, this formidable leader informally started working at Rathburn Tool & Manufacturing during school summers, cleaning bathrooms and floors among other tasks.

Today, she sees the return to her roots as part of her destiny, coming back home bearing experience gained in other fields. "I am excited about the work that we do, the amazing people that I get to work with every day. I continue to learn about the CNC precision machining industry every day and am working to improve," she says, acutely in touch with current market trends.

Part of the beauty of this story is that, back in the day, Cole, who joined the company in 1987, was an early mentor to Holt. "We are an interesting mix," shares Jerry Rathburn. "We have all been intertwined between family and business for thirty-five to forty years," As Holt's father, Rathburn is understandably pleased with how far the business has come.

Continuing its tradition of asking, 'How can we do it better?' the company's exploration and capital investment in contributing ever-growing segments of its output to the defense and aerospace markets is something the entire team is excited about. This work is not only challenging but also very rewarding when it comes to staying on top of industry developments and keeping sharp.

As Cole points out, with the honesty Jerry Rathburn established as part of the company's ethos, integrity remains a given at this legacy firm and will ensure a bright, strategically planned future. There are also whispers of a possible clean facility sprouting roots across the road from its current facility where its next exploration—this time in medical devices—may soon take place. We look forward to seeing what comes next. ■

Content Developed by Jamal Francis-Anderson | Designed by Isaac McWhinnie





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5005 County Road 29, Auburn, Indiana 46706 | **P:** (260) 925-2128 | **F:** (260) 925-5158 | **E:** info@rathburntool.com

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