

Owner with Experience Would Keep Patterns of Success

The new owner of a long-established Youngstown patternmaking shop is as seasoned at his craft as the wood he uses to make the forms that create foundry castings.

Liberty Pattern & Mold Inc., established in 1917 by Clyde Morgan, was purchased April 1 by John M. Plaskett, now president and owner. Plaskett bought the company from the founder's son, Russell C. Morgan, who operated the business for the past 50 years.

No public money or low-interest loans were used in the purchase. Instead, Plaskett says he used a combination of his own capital and a conventional bank loan.

The new owner began working at the company in 1974 under a five-year internship program. Later, he became a journeyman pattern maker, and he was appointed general manager and secretary/treasurer in 1987.

"Patternmaking is very different compared to other woodworking trades," Plaskett explains. "To be successful, you have to know everything there is to know about the pattern trade and the foundry industry. You must have insight into industrial-machinery manufacturing and industry requirements."

A patternmaker, he adds, is both an artisan and a craftsman. "Being an artisan, the patternmaker must be able to look at a blueprint, visualize the product, and create it to exact specifications," he notes. "Any metal casting has to be preceded by a pattern and any company needing a casting needs a pattern. We make the pattern that forms the sand mold which will yield a casting."

"Our customers build new industrial machinery or rebuild or repair existing machinery," he continues. "We also make patterns for specialized railroad equipment and steel-manufacturing machinery."

Liberty Pattern & Mold has some 20 regular customers, including United Foundries Inc., Youngstown; CMT Inc., Youngstown; Albco Foundry & Machine Inc., Lisbon; Oakes Foundry, Warren; Quaker City Casting Inc., Salem; and Reichard Industries Inc., Columbiana. Other regular customers

operate foundries in Ohio, Pennsylvania, Illinois and Michigan. The company employs five full-time journeymen, an apprentice and a pattern finisher, Plaskett says.

"We deal with industry and are not-consumer oriented," he explains. "Most people don't know what's done at a pattern shop. Once in awhile, I'll get a call from some lady asking me if we have dress patterns here. Others call and ask if we make one-dimensional templates."

After a pattern is made, it is shipped to a foundry, placed in a mold box and covered with a chemically bonded sand. When the sand hardens, the pattern is removed from the mold, Plaskett says.

Each pattern is made with tapered surfaces and painted with a hard lacquer. This allows the pattern to be removed from the mold without displacing the sand or having sand adhere to the wooden pattern.

"At this point, any type of metal - iron, brass, steel or aluminum - can be poured into the mold," Plaskett says. "After the molten metal solidifies, the sand mold is broken away. Then, the new casting is removed."

Greg Hunter, a company journeyman, says being a skilled craftsman leads to many creative avenues in the woodworking trade. Hunter loves his craft, which he finds interesting and fulfilling.

"I've worked here seven years," he says. "John Plaskett is the guy who trained me as an apprentice. Right from the start, I loved woodworking. There's a lot of creativity to this kind of work. No two projects are ever the same." **ES**

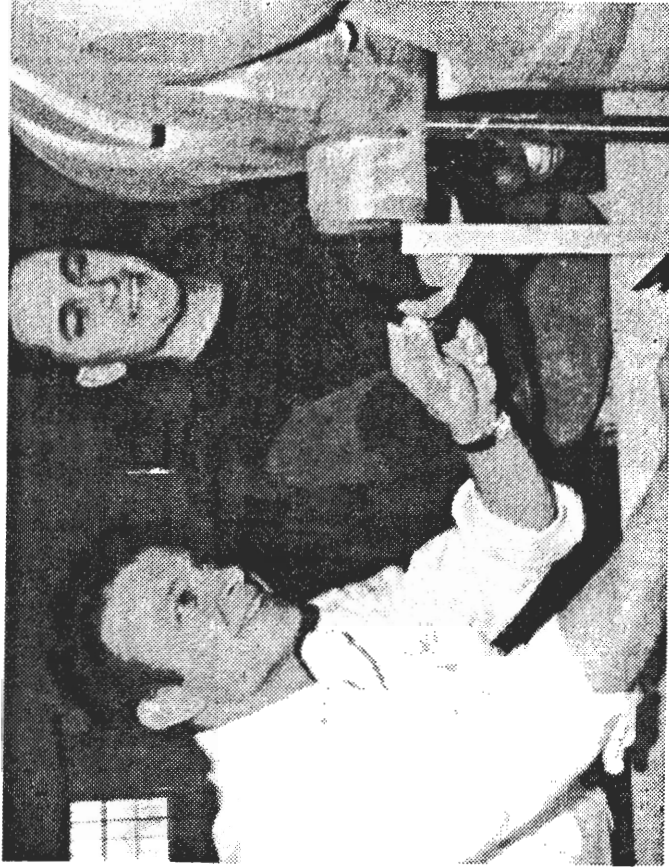


Photo by Sam Vargo

EYEING THINGS UP - At left, John M. Plaskett, president and owner of Liberty Pattern & Mold Inc., measures a pattern at his shop while journeyman Greg Hunter watches. Plaskett, a longtime employee of the shop, became the owner April 1.