

# Fordsell's Journey

Founded in 1946, Fordsell Machine Products began as a supplier of single-spindle, screw-machine parts. David Redfield and his wife, Jean Redfield, who bought the company in 1998, found that, like many in the industry, it was defined by the equipment it used to make products.

"We found that the equipment we use isn't the most useful way to define what we do," David Redfield, president of Fordsell says. "It's hard to find customers, but easy to find equipment. So, we looked at the primary industries we serve, which are hydraulics, pneumatics and medical equipment, and found out what they needed from suppliers."

That change in thinking and identity for Fordsell spurred a period of change that started with equipment investments and took the company on a journey of improvement that continues today. They invested in the core technology base, adding CNC Swiss and CNC turning machines, and now more than half of the products Fordsell produces come from the CNC section of the shop.

In 2008, the company felt the impact of the recession and made tough decisions to live through it. The lessons learned through the recession stuck with the business.

"We built a sophisticated cash flow model and dashboard that we can use to keep a finger on the pulse of the business and not have anything sneak up on us again," says Mr. Redfield.

With equipment, team and financial systems in place, the next step on the journey was the physical environment of the plant.

"Our customers needed clean parts and invited their suppliers on a journey that lead us to transform the plant," says Mr. Redfield. "We had invested in quality assurance, including achieving ISO certification."

In 2013, Fordsell undertook an extensive plant makeover that included not only repainting the plant and epoxy coating the floor, but also creating an entire new plant layout driven by a cross-functional team from management and team members.

"PMPA members helped us tremendously on this part of our journey. We learned from what other members were doing and they welcomed us into their shops where we picked up ideas that became our own solution, made from ingredients that other PMPA members were generous enough to share," explains Mr. Redfield. "The team also took ownership of the transformation. I left them with a lean consultant to visit



Photo by Michael Sarnacki, newcityphoto.com, for Macomb Community College

a customer and they sent me a new plant layout that they had come up with. It was exciting to see our team make that step and own the journey."

The best result of the transformation for Mr. Redfield was the pride their customers have in them as a supplier, which brought Fordsell closer into their businesses.

"The first reaction when someone who knew what we had been sees the change is, 'wow,'" says Mr. Redfield.

Fordsell became a PMPA member in 1951, only five years after its founding. The Redfields, who are the company's third owners, continue to maintain the company's consistent membership.

"There are so many benefits to membership. Everyone is aware of the technical support, the listserves and the help from the administration office, but the support among the entire membership is beyond words," explains Mr. Redfield. "Members are basically all hands-on shop owners who also take a hands-on approach to the association. The member-focus is what makes PMPA stand apart from other associations of which we are members."

As the Redfields look forward to the next phase of Fordsell's journey, they recognize and value the importance and strength of the team, the value of the culture, the trust of the clients and the support of PMPA along the way.

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