

A1 Polishing Grows Through Automation

“We understand if we don’t take care of our customers and employees, someone else will”. I’ve seen



a few company mission statements in my days, but I’m not sure that I’ve seen one that includes this line. When Allan Lefeber started A1 Polishing & Finishing with a business partner more than 19 years ago, they set out to provide exceptional value-added services with a focus on

quality and on-time delivery. This emphasis on quality and fair treatment of customers and employees alike resulted in steady growth that continues today.

Lefeber will be the first to tell you that there have been a few bumps along the way, but persistence pays off. A1 now employs 34 full time employees and serves more than 60 different customers at its 32,000 square foot facility in New Holstein. The reputation that A1 has built through its core values continues to bring new opportunities for growth. Sounds great, right? Though growth is something every company strives for, it also presents challenges. Capital, human resources and capacity challenges to name a few. Never being one to shy away from a challenge, Lefeber found a solution that would allow A1 to grow without adding space or substantially increasing production staff. That solution was a robot.



A1 specializes in large-run production polishing jobs and offers many specialized services including bead blasting, vibratory finishing, and shot blasting as well as outstanding industry standard polishing, finishing, and grinding. Much of what A-1 does is very labor intensive and requires skilled equipment operators. So how could Lefeber “train” a robot to do this work? He turned to a company from Italy that was able to make exactly what he needed.

The new robotic cell requires one operator to load and inspect the parts and another to perform a final finishing process. The cell takes up only fourth of the space that a manual cell would require, increases product through-put by 400%, reduces inspection time, reduces errors and saves energy to boot! The cell reduces annual electric energy use by nearly 100,000 kilowatt hours (kWh) and electric demand by

more than 46 kilowatts (kW) compared to a conventional cell. Because Lefeber worked closely with New Holstein Utilities (NHU) and Focus on Energy prior to purchasing the equipment, he was able to get a custom energy efficiency incentive grant of more than \$10,000 from Focus and an additional \$1,000 from NHU to help fund the project. Total incentives, including air make-up unit upgrades and compressed air heat recovery, came to more than \$23,000.



Whether it’s lighting, compressed air or robots, contact Frank Barth at 920-573-0155 or fbarth@wppienergy.org for help with your next project.