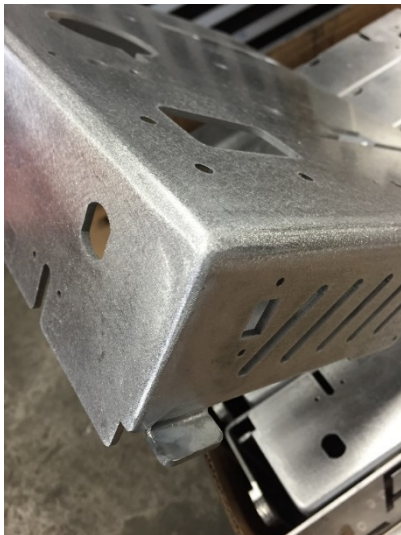


## From the shop floor to the corner office: an interview with Laystrom’s President Colin Cosgrove



*In a recent interview with David Robinson, Laystrom Manufacturing President, Colin Cosgrove, shared his insights on a range of issues from leadership to the skills gap. Here are some of the highlights of the interview.*



### The Vital Role of Organizations like CMRC

*“Groups like the CMRC, like Manufacturing Renaissance, like Manufacturing Connect, they have the ability to communicate to different groups like businesses, elected officials, and educators with different agendas, and they find a way of bridging the communication gaps between them. That’s where CMRC can really make a difference. They are also outstanding at tying together manufacturers, all the interest groups, labor groups, political groups, media, and find common ground. That’s a pretty powerful place to be.”*

### Cosgrove describes the history of Laystrom

*“We are a company of about 50 people. This is a family owned business founded in 1951, but the family in the industry goes back about 30 years before that. We moved into this building in about ‘54. The owner is Bob Laystrom who lives in South Carolina. He’s also our engineering manager and he is the chairman of the board. I came in, in a sales capacity, about ten years ago.*

*I was here for a number of years and I had a very good relationship with Bob. I had moved on about five years ago to seek some new challenges for myself. Bob and I stayed in touch, so I came back in when he was looking to transition out of state. He brought me in as the first non-family member president.”*



## Fabrication is at the Core of the Laystrom Business

“Historically, we’re a hardware and tool and die company going back 50, 60 years. It became a stamping company primarily and 30 percent of our business is still stampings. Our core business today is wrapped around fabrication, sheet metal fabrications. That transition really took place from the 80’s through 2006. **What we do is fabricated metal; stainless steel; aluminum; mild steels; laser cutting; forming; press brake; welding; MIG welding; TIG welding, and inserting hardware** so you can add additional components onto a piece of material. We use our vendors to get the parts painted or plated to have some sort of coating or protection on them and some assembly thereafter.”

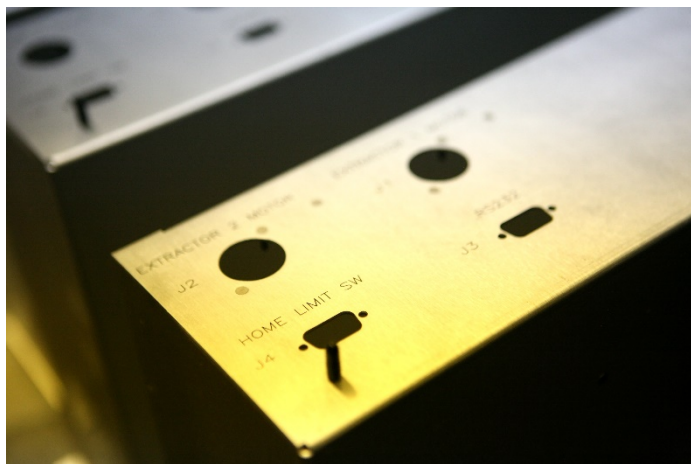
## A Wide Variety of Industries Served By Laystrom Products

“Our parts go to the medical industry; telecommunications; agriculture; construction; laboratories; electrical or power grid services; and, musical instruments. **The big three are the agricultural construction group, the telecom group and the power or electrical grid group.**”



## From Shop Floor to President’s Office—Cosgrove Shares His Rise in the Industry

“Ireland has a history of immigration. That’s just part of the nature of the history of our peoples. So, in 1994, I was in college in Ireland but wasn’t being very successful at it and had an opportunity to come over here and had cousins in the Chicago area. One of them knew somebody who was the vice president for a manufacturing company, and I reached out to him and made a connection. That company was down on the Southside of Chicago, building sheet metal parts. They



were typically into office furniture, printer stands, desks, and cubicles.” “So, I walked in and the guy says “Hey, that’s a press brake. Here’s how you use it. Here’s how you make parts.” So, I started on that level on the shop floor and worked my way from there to engineering, from operator level, literally entry level on the shop floor to setting up equipment, then learning how to program equipment, then going

into engineering, and going from engineering in different organizations around Chicago. I've worked with six or seven organizations around Chicago, always in metal fabrication, some stamping experience, some machining experience. Each organization had different focuses in terms of their customer base. I was constantly just picking up new knowledge, new skills along the way and engaging with different people on the way--different mentors that I could learn from. By doing that and doing a lot of work and being open minded to what opportunities were available to me, I worked my way up the ladder a little bit. I worked in production supervision and then project management. In 2006, I had the opportunity to come here, again, in the sales capacity. I've done most jobs on the shop floor and then I got the opportunity to flip into a sales role."

"Transitioning me into this role as president took a lot of planning and work between Bob and I. It wasn't an easy decision for him to make. He was president here for 29 years. That's a big change that he was making. It's a big change for the organization."

## Colin Remarks on Leadership and Management

"I have to choose to have the self-discipline to not be engaged too deeply with things that I shouldn't be engaged in and to trust the people that we have in all the other positions here to do their jobs well. I'm not a micromanager. I don't have a desire to be. I want to trust the people I have around me are going to hold me accountable. **I think I have a responsibility to try to create an environment where people feel like they can contribute their best work. If I can do that, and we've got good people here then, that's a really big part of me doing my job.** It's about trying to create an environment culturally and that

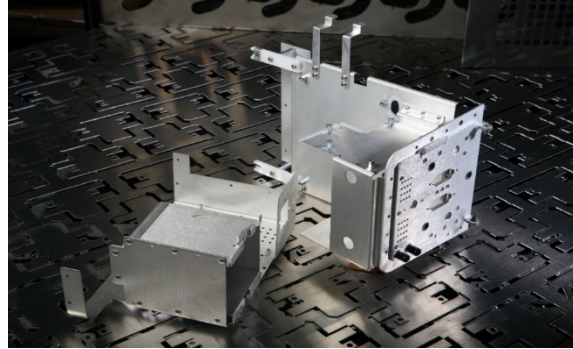
"I believe in setting an environment where there's motivation, that people are motivated by their surroundings, by their own internal motivations, their own internal drivers or being satisfied because they work somewhere where they can see that their accomplishments are going to be recognized."

involves multiple layers. Are we compensating people appropriately? That's a really important thing. But, not just doing that, are we creating a dialogue between my direct reports or even in another level or two beyond that? Everybody here knows my name. We're a small organization, 50 people. We have a meeting three days a week, with every single employee. Six-minute meeting

down on the shop floor, and everybody is there for that. We have a written open door policy, where people also know they can walk in here and point out something they're not happy about."

## The Skills Gap is real but that's just part of the story

I think the idea of the skills gap is pretty valid. The evidence I have seen myself in trying to hire people and conversations with other people who have been trying to hire is that it's been really challenging to find somebody that's got the talent, skills, capability, knowledge, all of the above to come to work every day. I saw a company on LinkedIn that does similar work to what we do. They're based out of Michigan and I know them. They're a very good organization. They have a skilled workforce. They're advertising on LinkedIn that they're paying \$1,000 bonus to any operator who will join them.



"I heard the argument that manufacturers don't pay people enough. I don't agree with it. You pay somebody \$20 an hour, but they're not capable of earning that. I just don't think it's a valid way of thinking about how to answer the problem. That's at best a Band-Aid because what you need is a set of skilled people who can deliver value to customers. There is a fundamental market capitalist rule, right? The market has to value what you're delivering, whether it's a service or a product. It doesn't matter whether somebody's being paid \$5.00, \$10.00, \$15.00 or \$25.00 an hour. You have to have the capability that is sustainable."

## Cosgrove: The Industry has a Perception Problem

"The whole picture that needs to be told is there are jobs that can be fulfilled and that those jobs are fulfilling. So, it's two parts to that. It's not a dead end job. It's not a greasy job. There's nothing wrong with jobs for people who are getting their hands dirty."

## Success takes work and commitment from everyone involved

"Success at every level in a company or in an organization or as an individual involves a commitment from the organization. We welcome somebody in who is going to contribute and we'll give them an opportunity to succeed. But, if an employee shows up who doesn't contribute, then they're taking away from the other parts of the organization. We can't accept that. We are going to hold people accountable. It doesn't matter where they're coming from. I don't care. I'm agnostic in that sense. I do care in what you're interested in contributing. We want people to say how can we make a difference here? If I can stand in front of people and say, "Here's what I did. I was making less than \$8.00 an hour on a shop floor. That was the entry point. 22 years later, I'm a president of a company. That took years, but I showed up every day. That is a big part of it, just showing up and being interested and being curious. But, every day show up. Every day, without fail, without exception, show up. If you do that, then you've got an opportunity to do very well."