

ShawanoLeader Chamber Insert

It could end up being a trifecta year for J&R Machine Inc. of Shawano.

By Tim Ryan
Leader Reporter

The company has been named Manufacturer of the Year by the Shawano Country Chamber of Commerce, and — in a first for the company — is one of 39 businesses nominated as Wisconsin Manufacturer of the Year.

The company also won the Turnaround of the Year Award from the Turnaround Management Association, a national organization based in Chicago, for the way in which it came back to financial health from near failure a few years ago.

The award was presented last October in Orlando, Fla. to David Finkbiner, who helped lead the turnaround, and who now serves as chief financial officer.

“We’ve had a lot of changes take place in our company in the last three or four years,” said Tim Tumanic, owner of J&R Machine.

The company’s problems date back to Sept. 11, 2001, part of the fallout from the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington.

“It all dates back to 9/11,” Tumanic said. “The manufacturing sector pretty much tanked. The whole economy did.” At the same time, like many other manufacturers, J&R was losing business to China and Taiwan, and they took another hit when steel prices doubled.

“It totaled up to some serious problems for us here,” Tumanic said. “We at one time had thought about, ‘do we want to continue to be in business? Are we going to be able to be in business in the face of all this adversity?’”

That’s when Finkbiner was hired as a consultant. Among the changes implemented was a move toward “lean manufacturing,” in which all of J&R’s 26 employees have been trained.

“It’s a common sense approach to eliminating waste, taking the waste out of everything you do,” Tumanic said.

The company also took a hard look at its customer base and revamped it. “We fired our second largest customer,” Tumanic said, explaining that the client was not a good or profitable fit. “I’ve never done anything like that before.”

But if winning Turnaround of the Year is not enough to prove that it was worth it, the company’s bottom line certainly is. “Our financial numbers are way above the national average for machine shops,” Tumanic said.

Two awards and a nomination for a third is almost an embarrassment of riches for the company. “We’ve always been kind of modest and always kept a low profile,” Tumanic said. But he is happy to see the company being recognized for the sake of his employees.

“I feel great about this for the employees more than anything,” Tumanic said. “They have done an awesome job, and that’s why we’re succeeding.” Tumanic said he is proud of the loyalty of his employees, all of whom stayed with him through the tough times. “Everybody stuck by the company,” he said. “It was a team effort.”

J&R Machine was started in 1987. Tumanic purchased the company in 1994. Prior to that he had run various machine shops as a general manager.

Tumanic moved up to the Shawano area with his family when he was about 10 or 11 years old. “I’ve lived in the Shawano area about 30 of my 48 years, and I’ve seen it grow,” he said. “I love the area. It’s been good to us.”

That is one reason why he and J&R have been so active with and on behalf of the community and the chamber of commerce.

The company has participated in the Wolf River School-to-Work program, has sponsored the fireworks display, donated some 220 man-hours to the 2003-2004 SnoCross Race, donated \$15,000 to the Crawford Center and \$10,000 to a new chamber building, and is a Booster member of the chamber. “As a corporate citizen we want to give back to the community,” Tumanic said.