



Tragedy Offers a Silver Lining

After a fire at its previous facility, Morton, IL-based Cornerstone Architectural Concepts has set up a new shop with improved flow.

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The company was able to outfit its new facility with all new equipment, such as the machine above.

The vast majority of companies will never have to go through something as serious as their manufacturing facilities burning to the ground. But that was the unfortunate case for Morton, IL-based Cornerstone Architectural Concepts Inc.

“The fire started at about 11:00 p.m., and I happened to be in the building working in the office,” says President Jeff Kuykendall. “At around 11:15 p.m. I started hearing some funny noises. I went out to the shop to look and it was all just smoke and flames.”

Luckily, no people were injured. But the same could not be said for the facility itself. According to Kuykendall, no machinery was able to be salvaged from the fire.

“The next morning we called SCM to let them know, because we had been buying machinery from SCM since about ‘90 or ‘91,” he says. “We had just bought a five-axis Morbidelli CNC machine seven months earlier. So I called them and said, ‘You

are never going to believe this, but our place burned to the ground.’ The person who was in charge of the Morbidelli division at that time, as well as the company president, flew up a week later. We met at my house and we ordered all new machinery for the new building. Not often do the president of the company and the regional sales rep fly out to your house.”

The company was able to use a rental facility for nine months while the new location was being built, though its manufacturing was still shut down for three months. Kuykendall says that though Cornerstone did lose a lot of work, there were still positive developments.

“We moved into a rental facility and had customers that waited for us,” he says. “We had two customers that put their entire house on hold and waited for us. Once we were functional, we had work instantly, so it was not like we had to go drum up work.”

INSIDE THE CUSTOM SHOP



The newly-built facility is 21,000 square feet and features in-floor heating. The employees participated in the design and layout of the new shop.

“After the fire, we never laid off a single person,” he continues. “Everyone stayed busy. They came to my house every day and we would make tool carts and work benches in my garage.”

New Plant, New Ideas

Even though the fire was devastating, there was a bright side. Kuykendall says that having the opportunity to start all over again with more space to work with, brand new equipment and two months to plan was exciting. It also allowed the company to make improvements that were not possible before.

“As far as what we changed here, the flow was important,” says Kuykendall. “Before, when you have a smaller building and footprint, you deal with that. You add on to it, but it is kind of chopped up and cut up. But starting over from scratch, we came up with a flow. We actually made a scale drawing of the shop floor. With AutoCAD we made all the machinery, sizes of machinery, and placed them on there. We made carts and different sizes of lumber and put them on the carts and literally pushed them around the paper to see how the flow would go. And then we came up with a plan and proceeded forward with that. We were able to change our whole scope of how a single project flows through the shop and to be as lean as possible.”

The company’s seven employees were heavily involved in the new shop floor design. “We thought there was no better way to design the new shop than to let the employees be a part of it,” says Kuykendall. “They know how they performed their tasks and how the environment around them affected it. So we let the employees have a part in designing the interior. It was really good to see them all pull together, and everybody contributed something to how the new shop layout was to be.”

Using Technology

Cornerstone makes a variety of products, including cabinets, millwork, moulding, stair parts, closets and more.

“Almost anything made out of wood you possibly want, we’ll make,” says Kuykendall. “The strangest thing we have made is a cremation urn. It happens to be in Arlington National Cemetery. It was for a World War II veteran.

“[What we make] is 80 percent residential and 15 percent commercial,” he adds.



The company lost nearly everything in the fire (above), with not one piece of machinery able to be salvaged.



Cornerstone manufactures a wide array of products such as millwork, cabinets, stair parts, closets, moulding and more, including the wine cellar shown above.

“However, since the fire, we did purchase machinery that will help us in the commercial industry if we choose to go that route. We tried to gear things so that if a commercial job we feel comfortable with comes along, we can take on that project.”

The facility has a variety of SCM equip-

ment, including an edgebander, case clamp, planer, moulding knife grinder and five-axis Morbidelli CNC machine; as well as a DMC planer/sander; Vanguard shaper; and a spray booth with equipment by Graco.

The company is also very software-friendly and tries to use technology to

its utmost advantage.

“I am a firm believer in technology, both in software and machinery,” says Kuykendall. “Software is my best friend. We use Cabinet Vision from Planit Solutions with a screen-to-machine feature. I also use the companion that Planit puts out. It’s like a scaled-down version of Cabinet Vision. We also use AlphaCam from Planit, as well as ETemplate Systems [for 3-D digital measuring].

“Currently, I am researching stair software so we can start producing our stairs on a CNC rather than the old fashioned way. Right now, I design products and engineer them, then I go out and work in the shop with the guys during the day.”

Forging Ahead

With new business and new surroundings, Cornerstone continues to move forward, putting a silver lining on a dark cloud. Increased efficiencies due to the new technology and the layout of the building are expected.

“It has been a life-changing experience to go through something like that,” Kuykendall says of the fire. “Over the years, you build up your business and get it to where you are feeling comfortable. You

are getting new machinery and you feel like you are get-

ting on top, and then all at once, everything is taken away from you and you realize it is really not yours to begin with. But now, we have this great new facility that is twice the size, and we really feel that the work flow is better. We were able to design it specifically for this.” ❁