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Growth Through Collaboration, Year After Year

Micron Metal Finishing, a job shop based in the south suburbs of Chicago, is a veteran of the Top Shops program. The shop's co-owners walk through the shop's growth over the years.

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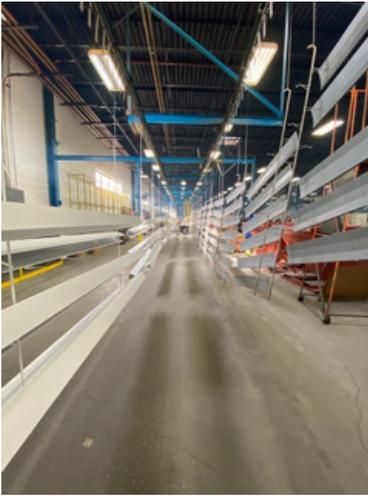
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Powder and dip coating specialist Micron Metal Finishing (Bridgeview, Ill.) is a seasoned member of *Products Finishing's* Top Shops program. Micron has been included on the list year after year, and for good reason — the collaborative spirit that makes the shop run is palpable.



All images: Micron Metal Finishing

Micron was founded in 2009 by two former competitors, Brad Watt and Scott Rauter, who had decided to join forces after decades of working in the powder coating industry for smaller, family-owned businesses. At the time, the U.S. was slowly exiting a major recession, and while the conditions were not ideal for opening a new business, Watt and Rauter leaned on each other's expertise and accepted the challenge. With other shops in the Chicago area closing, the partners were able to acquire some used equipment to get started.



Micron's 75,000 square ft. facility houses three electrostatic thermoset spray lines and two thermoplastic dip lines.

“We opened with one powder coating line and about 12 employees, including ourselves,” Watt says. “We knew all the key players in the Chicago area, so we feel like we were able to handpick the best of the best when we put the team together.”

Since opening, the shop has grown to over 65 employees running five lines — three conveyerized electrostatic thermoset spray lines and two thermoplastic dip lines, which coat plastisol, nylon and epoxy dip coatings. Rauter suggests the shop's

spray lines can powder coat volumes of parts that are among the largest in the country. “Our larger line can handle parts up to 95 inches high by 40 inches wide by 120 inches long,” he says, “and our small line handles parts 60 inches high by 30 inches wide by 120 inches long.”

Micron primarily services the housewares, electronics and OEM components markets, as well as lawn and garden, lighting and store fixturing. Being a job shop, the types of parts that Micron runs are constantly changing.

“We handle different parts every week, so communication is huge around here,” Watt says. “We make sure everything that is discussed in the office gets out onto the shop floor.”

Onshoring, consumer spending drives new jobs



In 2018, the shop added dip coating lines, which enables it to add a thick, protective coating to parts that have an unusual shape, such as football facemasks.

Much of Micron's business in the last few years has been driven by changes in consumer spending during the pandemic. With people traveling less, they seem to be spending more on home projects, which has impacted Micron's building materials sector. Rauter explains that these jobs "have really ramped up due to consumer machining and spending."

In addition to shifts in consumer behavior, Watt and Rauter have also seen another pandemic-related trend lately: onshoring. Rauter attributes this to supply chain issues with companies that outsource their business overseas.



"Hopefully, large companies will realize that by going offshore, you are more susceptible to bottlenecks in the supply chain," Rauter says, adding, "and maybe they'll bring more

manufacturing back to the U.S. for the long-term."

In reflecting on being one of *PF*'s Top Shops over the years, the duo expresses that the program has enabled them to quantify their advancements in new ways. Watt explains, "Growth isn't always just the amount of customers you have. A lot of the time it's fine-tuning yourself internally." He concludes, "When you do that, you have less reworks, less safety concerns and the company is growing."