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'It's a Wonderful Life' Working with Precision Turned Parts

Upon his retirement, Greg Knight reflects on his cherished relationships as well as the challenges he has faced during his career in manufacturing.

[#columns](#)

GREG KNIGHT, VP OF SALES, PRODUCTION TURNING, ABSOLUTE MACHINE TOOLS

Most of us know well the Frank Capra film, "It's a Wonderful Life," starring Jimmy Stewart as the affable George Bailey who has big dreams and strong family and community ties. When George's father suddenly dies, George must take over the family's business and put aside his own aspirations. I see and feel these similarities in my own story.

My parents had a screw machine shop they established in 1970 called J&M Screw Products in Carroll, Ohio, named after the first letters of their names, Justus and Mildred. I worked part time there through high school and college, deburring and washing parts and hand-loading parts for secondary ops. This was boring to me, as my passions were psychology, philosophy, religion and sociology. I studied those subjects at Carroll College in Wisconsin, starting in 1973. Everything I was doing in college was geared toward an advanced degree in psychology. However, graduate school was beyond my financial reach. Because I refused to go into debt, I put that goal on hold while I earned money.

Meanwhile, my parents' shop was growing and expanding as the years ticked by, and I continued to work there and at other part-time jobs. Gradually, my dad's health declined, and my mom persuaded me to work at their shop full time. I had few skills beyond parts deburring and knew I'd never be happy doing repetitive tasks. So, I learned how to set up and run the screw machines. Then I learned how to lay out the cams, grind form tools and design fixtures.

In 1982, my father died of a massive heart attack on the shop floor, weeks before he planned to retire. I was suddenly thrust into a new level of leadership. I was the only child, so there was no one else who could take over the business relatively seamlessly.



Greg Knight receives the prestigious PMPA Gold Micrometer Award for 40 years of service from fellow member Doug Coster, president, Nolte Precise Manufacturing. Photo Credit: Precision Machined Products Association

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Fast forward through the decades. We sold J&M Screw and I went to work for AMT Machine Systems, the company that designed and made ServoCam controls for “Brownies.” There, I added the Lico line of screw machines. After 15 years of growth there, I started a company called Advanced Machinery Solutions (AMS), and it became the exclusive North American distributor for Lico. Those machines were designed like the old screw machines and lathes, but also had the flexibility and precision of a CNC. In 2017, AMS was purchased by [Absolute Machine Tools](#).

It’s been fascinating in my lifetime to watch the evolution of the technology unfold from the manual cam Swiss-types to the now complex multi-axis, all-in-one, multitasking machinery marvels.

[Read: When a CNC Turn-Mill Doesn’t Turn](#)

While peripheral automation, Industry 4.0, data-driven manufacturing and so on have yet to be fully embraced by the precision machining sector, it is here as the many articles in *Production Machining* document. I advise everyone to learn as much as they can about these topics. It’s important to ensure that whatever level of automation you start adding into your operations to be sure it will be able to communicate with whatever equipment and processes you implement in the future. It’s best to have an automation plan right at the start and take manageable steps. And, while new tools and automation are paramount, remember that people will always be the who and the what that make things work.

I have an inherent desire to always learn and I enjoy working relationships with smart people. Relevant to that, I must applaud the [Precision Machined Products Association](#) (PMPA) and the role it has played in my career. When I first joined, I attended the local chapter meetings and I delighted in meeting other people in the industry who all had the same goal. Over the years, I’ve remained an active and enthusiastic PMPA member. Like many of us who wind up in manufacturing by accident, most of us stay. It’s a wonderful life, indeed.

About the Author



Greg Knight retired from Absolute Machine Tools almost one year ago, but has remained part of its Production Turning Team, doing consulting work and time studies. At PMPA’s Annual Meeting this year, Greg received the Technical Member Distinguished Service Award.