

Sterling-Rock Falls LIVING

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A Sterling company has been providing local manufacturers the tools of their trade for more than 30 years

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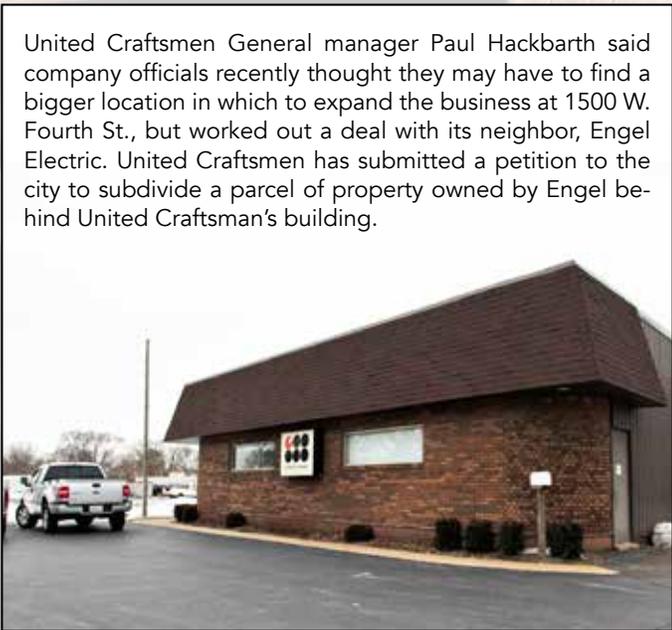
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In the 30-plus years it's been in business, **United Craftsmen** has become an **important cog** in the local manufacturing scene, providing companies with the **tools of their trade**, and now they're **gearing up for another expansion**

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United Craftsmen General manager Paul Hackbarth said company officials recently thought they may have to find a bigger location in which to expand the business at 1500 W. Fourth St., but worked out a deal with its neighbor, Engel Electric. United Craftsmen has submitted a petition to the city to subdivide a parcel of property owned by Engel behind United Craftsmen's building.

For more than 30 years, United Craftsmen in Sterling has carved out a niche in the local parts manufacturing industry producing orders to die for. Started in 1987 at 1500 W. Fourth St. by six brothers of the Sedig family, but now owned by Doug and Patricia Grunnet, the local machining and tooling specialists have produced a steady stream of steel and aluminum parts that most likely have found a home in many of the products in the local area. It is a local company that deals with local customers and since they have the capability to produce only a few parts for an order, they keep pretty busy. "Local manufacturers are probably 99 percent of our customers," said general manager Paul Hackbarth. "We do most of our business within a 60-mile radius." That business includes perishable tooling, short-run turning and milling, general machining, machining of component parts, die maintenance and electrical discharge machining. They can take most requests for a part design from customers and turn them into finished products.

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“Almost everything is custom made. We get most of our stuff from e-mail and then if we can do it we quote it,” Hackbarth said. “It’s made to print from supply drawings and blueprints.”

The tools of their trade are a mix of old and new equipment, with some of the machines 80 years old and some brand new, Hackbarth said.

Their versatility is one of their strongest assets, he said.

“We can do orders from one to 1,000 because we’re set up for higher run production,” Hackbarth said. “But our bread and butter is the small quantity production. We still have a niche business for the lower volume stuff.”

Another huge asset for United Craftsmen is their 14 employees. Hackbarth has been seeing many of the same faces when he shows up for work for more than two decades. Three employees have worked there more than 25 years, a few more from 10 to 15 years and then there are the newbies, with only a year or 2 on the job.

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United Craftsmen creates pieces based on CAD models or blueprints that a company provides. When the company first opened, the staff would get an order and then have to wait a few days to get the drawings in the mail before they could start production. These days, “with the internet, now it’s only a matter of about an hour,” general manager Paul Hackbarth said.


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ABOVE: United Craftsmen general manager Paul Hackbarth holds a cutter blade the company made. Parts big and small and orders the same, United Craftsmen has been handling jobs for local companies for more than 30 years. "We can do orders from one to 1,000 because we're set up for higher run production," Hackbarth said. "But our bread and butter is the small quantity production."

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“It’s a nice place to work. We keep it laid back and we keep employees,” Hackbarth said. “It’s a good group of guys.”

Some of those guys, like Hackbarth, have seen quite a few changes since they first walked in the door at United Craftsmen. He said that decades ago they would get an order and wait a few days to get the drawings in the mail before they could start production.

“With the internet, now it’s only a matter of about an hour,” he said.

They count local companies Wahl Clipper, Franz Manufacturing and Rayovac as customers, among many others. It’s a customer list that keeps growing. United Craftsmen expanded in 1997 and it may be at that point again.

Hackbarth said the company recently thought they may have to find a bigger location to expand again, but worked out a deal with nearby Engel Electric. United Craftsmen has submitted a petition to the city to subdivide a parcel of property owned by Engel Electric behind their building.

“So we’re going to stay in our current location and can expand in the future,” Hackbarth said. ■



United Craftsmen has been a part of the manufacturing landscape in Sterling for more than 30 years and has many employees who’ve been with the company since the early years.

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