STEELFAB OF CHARLOTTE:
A True Testament to the Power of Partnerships

Executive Summary

CUSTOMER NAME: SteelFab, Inc.
INDUSTRY: Industrial Structural Steel Fabrication
LOCATION: Charlotte, NC, USA
CHALLENGE: How to automate their shop further without utilizing valuable shop footprint
SOLUTION: Peddinghaus’ Roller Feed design paired with small machine outbuildings
MACHINES INSTALLED: 7 Coping Machines, 5 Angle Lines, 3 Beam Punch Lines, 4 Plate Duplicators, 3 Plate Processors, 11 Band Saws (including mitered, straight cut, and cold saws), and 7 Drill Lines

A True Testament to the Power of Partnerships
“It has been said that a man is known by the company he keeps. And it is no more true than in business, where men are known by the companies they create and the clients they serve.” – This statement by J. Glenn Sherrill, founder of SteelFab Incorporated, is evident today at their Charlotte, North Carolina headquarters. 54 years since its inception SteelFab, Inc. continues to be a family owned and operated organization driven by customer satisfaction and powered by an incredibly talented group of individuals.

Now with six major locations across the United States and over 750 companywide employees SteelFab has proven themselves to be one of the premier fabricators leading steel construction today. The amount of growth that SteelFab has experienced since their humble beginnings as an ornamental handrail manufacturer is a true testament to the power of partnerships. Proud owners of 14 Peddinghaus machines at their Charlotte location alone, the SteelFab and Peddinghaus partnership has proven to be a winning combination.

Humble Beginnings
In 1955 J. Glenn Sherrill opened SteelFab near the Charlotte International Airport specializing in furnishing and installing ornamental...
handrails as well as porch columns. His previous experience as part owner of another structural shop in Salisbury, NC gave him the confidence and knowledge needed to set out on his own. After acquiring the essentials - a portable engine welder, stake bed truck, 300 amp rectifier welder, pipe and bolt threader, a drill press and plenty of hand tools - SteelFab hired its first employee and opened their doors for business.

The two employees that made up SteelFab’s workforce operated out of an old barn while Blanche Sherrill (Glenn Sherrill’s wife) maintained all of the necessary bookkeeping. Over the first fifteen years the company evolved into fabricating small structural projects including stairs, handrails, and copious amounts of base plates for a local precast supplier. By 1970 revenues reached $600,000 per year - this early success was the companies’ first major benchmark in the structural steel community.

A Family Business is a Good Business
In the years between 1970 and 1976 Glenn’s three sons; Phillip, Ron, and Don entered the business. As with any young businessmen they were full of ideas, ambition, and a contagious passion for success. Up until this point connection materials were produced on an ironworker, wide flange and heavy sections of beams were thermally cut by hand, and all holes were drilled manually using portable magnetic drills.

The energetic Sherrill brothers brought a new vigor to these processes and looked to automate. The first introduction to automation was a beam punch line purchased in the early 1980’s. With this initial taste of CNC efficiency SteelFab started fabricating projects of over 1,000 tons for many of the local Charlotte contractors. Realizing that automation was a great way to expedite procedures and cut costs SteelFab began to explore the future potential.

In the earlier part of the 1990’s the partnership between SteelFab and Peddinghaus grew with the addition of their first 9 spindle drill line. The ability to continue quoting larger projects and fabricating them in a much more efficient process with the automated drilling of heavy structural members was a continued catalyst for innovation. Over time as both companies have grown Peddinghaus and SteelFab’s relationship has continued to evolve at each of their six major shop locations with a list of Peddinghaus work horses that include:

- 7 Coping Machines
- 5 Angle Lines
Customer Case Study

- 3 Beam Punch Lines
- 4 Plate Duplicators
- 3 Plate Processors
- 11 Band Saws (including mitered, straight cut, and cold saws)
- 7 Drill Lines
- And the latest addition to their machine shop, the BDL-1250/9D high speed carbide drill line.

A Dedication to Efficiency

SteelFab’s success is not only due to their superior levels of service and dedication to customer satisfaction - A remarkable sense of efficiency is visible throughout the company and is a key factor for their success. Russell Barngrover, Vice President and Plant Manager is a seasoned steel fabrication veteran who came to SteelFab in Charlotte with a mission: to improve the existing shop and production methods, creating the most effective use of space and to cut costs at every level of operations. Having joined SteelFab after the addition of the CNC equipment Russell was tasked with working around existing structures as well as incorporating much of the on hand equipment.

“The first thing I noticed when I came to SteelFab was that all of the automation was INSIDE of the building! I wanted to move all of the machines outside that we could. You need to have your inside areas dedicated to welding, fit up, painting, etc. Our copers, angle line, beam lines, band saws, and cambering machine are all outside in a network of sheds paired with material handling. It just makes sense to do it that way, the Peddinghaus machines are designed for that.”

The fabrication shop in Charlotte is a tribute to much of what modern CNC equipment has to offer. Wide arrays of both new and old technologies are mixed together in a unique environment that creates an unprecedented level of shop flow. Having worked hand in hand with Peddinghaus’ shop layout experts Russell added buildings, poured new concrete foundations, and retrofitted the existing facility to create the perfect fit for their shop.

“Greg Carpenter, Peddinghaus System Engineer, was a tremendous help in the design of SteelFab’s current setup. When he visited and did the walkthrough with me here in Charlotte it was apparent that he was very knowledgeable. We have since removed a non-Peddinghaus system that was consistently not meeting our standards and installed the new BDL-1250/9D high speed carbide drill line. We’re now drilling 5” (127 mm) flanges on W14x730 beams in around 39 seconds compared to 2 minutes with our previous drill.” – Russell Barngrover
With similar control technology, SteelFab operators are able to switch to any of the other Peddinghaus machines which increases productivity.

How fast is the new machine? Russell’s observations reflect that of other BDL-1250/9D users, stating that he sees as much as a 50% faster production times.

“I remember when landing a 1,000 ton job was a big deal, now we process 1,000 tons in a week! It’s amazing what our machines have done for our capabilities in meeting short deadlines and keeping costs down.” – R. Glenn Sherrill Jr.

Clearer channels of communication have also opened new doors to the company. By utilizing a barcode system paired with portable computerized tablets shop supervisors can scan a piece of material and receive the complete drawing and details without ever leaving the floor or calling for assistance.

“All of the new technology we have implemented has truly opened new doors for SteelFab. Last year all of SteelFab's shops combined fabricated over 100,000 tons of steel - that wouldn’t be possible without our Peddinghaus equipment” – R. Glenn Sherrill Jr.

Poised for Success - How SteelFab is Staying Strong Now and Into the Future
SteelFab is a company true to who they are, a humble group whose pride comes not from their own successes but from the satisfaction of their customers. After a look at where they have been the future is full of optimism at SteelFab. The fabrication shop in Charlotte is still busy and they are prepared for the next upturn in the world’s economy.

“SteelFab is a company dedicated to the customer and that’s how we succeed. We truly value the relationships we have created with all of our customers. Our company thrives on repeat business and a high level of quality. I am proud to say that in our over fifty years of business we have not once been involved in any sort of litigation. It’s just not in our nature.” - Ron Sherrill

“We are very optimistic for the future of the Steel Fabrication Industry. Our philosophy is to look at the long term picture and not just the short term gains. In our 50 plus years in business we have seen a lot of ups and downs - this isn’t our first recession. Eventually the market will boom again and when that happens SteelFab will be there to reap the benefits. Our partnership with Peddinghaus will play a powerful factor in this next generation of SteelFab success.” – Ron Sherrill
Product List:

- Beam Drill Lines
- Anglemasters
- Plate Processing
- Coping Machines
- Thermal Cutting
- Automated Layout Marking
- Structural Band Saws
- Ironworkers
- Material Handling

For More Information

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