

BUSINESS

Editor: Carolyn Pione, cpione@enquirer.com Phone: 513-768-8373

Ferguson Metals acquired by O'Neal Steel A17

Ford explores possible sale of Aston Martin A17

IN STEEL, GEORGE A NAME TO REMEMBER

By Mike Boyer

Enquirer staff writer

LEBANON - Tons of structural steel for some of the area's most familiar buildings were cut, drilled and welded in a small factory just south of here on U.S. 42.

George Steel Fabricating, Inc. was founded more than 50 years ago as a farm-implement dealership and now is a leading supplier of fabricated steel for commercial construction in the Midwest. It has prepared steel for projects ranging from the Newport Aquarium and buildings in West Chester, the new Great Wolf Lodge in Mason and numerous medical and education buildings in the area.

It's a demanding business that requires working closely with architects and engineers to precisely place each cut and drill each hole on 30-ton slabs of steel so they fit together on a job site like a giant Erector set.

"Each job is different and custom," said John George, president of the family-owned company, which employs 50. A godsend has been the introduction of computer-aided design software and cutting equipment to speed the process of producing different beams.

Sales this year are projected to be \$30 million, up from \$10 million four years ago. The company expects to ship 10,000 tons of steel this year, up from 7,500 tons last year.

Time is money in the construction business, so beams 30 feet or more are lifted by one of the plant's 15 cranes into one end of the fabrication shop and shipped out the other side in a single day, George said.

Managing the flow of materials is also important, so pieces designed for the bottom of a structure have to be loaded on trucks last so they can be installed at the job site first.

A couple of George's largest projects earlier this year were supplying steel for the 975,000-square-foot Abercrombie & Fitch distribution center in New Albany, Ohio, outside Columbus, and supplying steel for the new Clambers P. Wiley VA Hospital on the east side of Columbus.

To support its growth, George is embarking on a \$1.7 million-plus expansion, adding 25,300 square feet for a third fabrication area and increasing the total building to 70,100 square feet. The project includes adding a \$750,000 computer-controlled plate-cutting machine. When the expansion is completed later this year, the company expects to add between 10 and 15 jobs, George said.

He said he isn't too worried about expanding the business amid signs that the national economy might be slowing.

"The last time we expanded (in 2000), the economy was slowing. When the (construction) market came back, we were ready. We're in the same situation today," he said.

Although the company has supplied steel for numerous projects in Greater Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky, it has reached out more to contractors in Indianapolis and Columbus, says George, whose father, Robert, and uncle, Harold, started the business in 1954 on the family's 120-acre farm.

The original farm-implement and sales business eventually was split into a welding business and a machine shop. When John joined the company in 1977, after graduating from Ohio State University, the company landed a contract to fabricate light poles for LSI Industries, the Blue Ash supplier of outdoor lighting and graphics.

In the mid-1980, the company began to diversify further into structural steel fabrication, and that became its main business after LSI took its light-pole business back in-house.



ABOVE: Andrew Mimic of Lebanon welds a plate onto a beam at George Steel Fabricating in Lebanon on U.S. 42.



ABOVE: Gregory McCracken (left), a chief financial officer, and John George, president of George Steel Fabricating.