

BIG CNC MACHINES BRING BIG REWARDS



ALLIANCE INNOVATIVE MANUFACTURING INC.

LOCATION: LACKAWANNA, NY

EMPLOYEES: 38

EQUIPMENT: 15 OKUMA CNC MACHINE TOOLS;
1 DOUBLE COLUMN MACHINING CENTER; 2 FIVE-
AXIS VERTICAL LATHES; 8 HORIZONTAL LATHES;
4 CNC MACHINING CENTERS

CERTIFICATIONS: ISO9001/AS9100 CERTIFIED
PRECISION CONTRACT MACHINING; OEM CERTIFIED
CUTTING TOOL SERVICES; ITAR REGISTERED

In 2011, Alliance Innovative Manufacturing chose the path less taken by making a strategic shift into large-part manufacturing. They went BIG. While the transformation was a big undertaking it's also brought them big rewards in just three years. Armed with two Okuma VTM-200YB's and now a new MCR-A5CII double column machining center they find themselves today in a position where jobs "sell themselves" because of the unique capabilities they have, and also because they've proven themselves reliable and efficient. Going big is not for the faint of heart. It takes risk and it takes guts. But it's paid off with a whole new world of opportunity for Alliance Innovative Manufacturing.

SHREWD AND RELIABLE

Upon hearing the name "Richard St. John" one might readily imagine a sly super-agent, in James Bond style. That's not far from the truth. The real Rich St. John shares the courage and tactical brilliance of any great stealthy competitor. As President of Alliance Innovative Manufacturing in Lackawanna, NY, he's provided leadership for the path they take today: dominance in the large-part manufacturing sector. Part of that dominance comes from aggressive pursuit of differentiation in the marketplace, and the other part is pure reliability.

Rich learned the machine tool trade working for his uncle at G.E. St. John Machine before moving to FP PLA Tool (Alliance Innovative's original company name) back in 1975. A quick study, he became a partner in the company by 1980. 2007 was a banner year for the company, when Rich was named President, and FP PLA Tool and sister company East Coast Tool and Manufacturing were brought together under a single united brand: Alliance Innovative Manufacturing. What started with a family connection has grown to include more family members; daughters Jeanine Zaleski and Sarah Kubicki, and both of their husbands, work at the company.

SETTING THE STAGE FOR RELIABILITY AND EFFICIENCY

When the company transitioned from manual to CNC machines several decades ago, the first thing they bought was an Okuma LC40 four-axis machine (and it's still running today). When shopping for this machine they compared Okuma with another builder's offering. While the size of the two contenders was about the same, they went with the Okuma because it weighed twice as much as its competitor. "Coming from an old school perspective, I'm looking at the cast iron of a machine. We elected to go with the solidness of the Okuma, thinking that it would be a lot more rigid and the horsepower of the machine would be higher as well." This proved to be true. Alliance went on to amass a small army of what they call "Green Machines", based not only on the avocado-green paint scheme that was used in the day, but also the fact that they've reliably made money. "Every hour, every day, every year, they make good parts," says Rich.

The Alliance Innovative team also noticed a big difference with the CNC control on the Okuma. The fact that this was a single-source supplier, with the machine and the control both made by Okuma, was evident and impactful. "The controller is a lot more user-friendly, and a lot more in tune with the machine. We couldn't get that from any other builder." Ease of use and harmonious communication between machine and control enable greater efficiency and productivity.

By 2011 Rich came to a realization. They were in competition with many mom-and-pop shops that were going after mid-range part sizes. The field was crowded and pricing was cutthroat. Why duke it out when you can rise above the fray? That's when Rich decided to go BIG. "If we didn't make a radical move, we wouldn't stay ahead of the curve."

GOING BIG (AND A LESSON ALONG THE WAY)

With help from Mitch Vogel and distributor Morris Great Lakes, Alliance dove into large format machining. They brought in an Okuma VTM-200YB 5-axis vertical lathe that can perform turning, vertical, horizontal, and angled surface machining in one operation. The VTM has a maximum swing diameter of 95 inches and can hold up to 22,000 pounds on



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 **RICH ST. JOHN**

the table (maximum workpiece load of nearly 16,000 pounds). According to Rich, "This machine specializes in doing very large, very accurate work. Now that's Alliance Innovative's specialty."

At the same time they purchased the Okuma VTM, Alliance also purchased a competing brand's double column machining center. With new business lined up and important customer relationships at stake, the company began making chips on the new equipment. They delivered on time with the Okuma machine, but six months late on the competitor's, due to delivery delays. Additionally, the competitor's equipment experienced a pattern of downtime that began almost immediately after installation. Alliance Innovative had staked their venture into large format machining on

this equipment and constant downtime was not an option. One year in, Alliance Innovative began turning away work that was to be performed on the competitor's equipment instead of risking damage to the company's reputation. The only thing worse than delivering a job late is not being able to finish the job at all, so something had to change. So Rich decided to pull that machine out and put in the Okuma MCR-A5CII double column machining center and another Okuma VTM. "I learned my lesson, buying pieces of equipment that say they can do things, but can't. As long as Okuma builds a machine in the size range I'm looking for, we'll stick with them," says Rich.

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THAT'S A LOT OF CHIPS

With large format machining capability, Alliance Innovative today caters to a few key markets. They primarily serve oil and gas customers, especially in the compressing industry (they machine major components that go into compressors). Some of these large parts go into the Okuma machines weighing about 14,000 pounds, and come out weighing about 6,000 pounds. These are very large pieces (and a lot of chips too), ranging from 30 – 70 inches in diameter. They also serve the aerospace industry making parts for flight simulators, and produce major components for nuclear reactors.

FLYING HIGHER, FASTER IN CLEAR AIR

Going big was a gutsy move. But by leapfrogging the competition Alliance Innovative moved up to the highest level of production, and into some nice clear air from a competitive standpoint. Jason Cowburn, Sales Manager for Alliance Innovative, says "the Okumas are awesome. From a competitive standpoint, it's actually very easy for me to sell parts made on those machines." Just by having the larger CNC machines, jobs seem to sell themselves because of their size and what they can do. And it's not just the size, but also the versatility that sets Alliance apart. Alliance is not only able to run parts faster for their customers, but they're also coming up with processes that make parts more efficiently. For example, because of the VTMs' five-axis turning and milling capabilities, they can cut down on the number of setups needed to produce parts.

Once jobs are in, the goal is to deliver on time, reliably, to the customer. Alliance has consistently delivered ahead of schedule. This leaves customers hungry for more – and sending more jobs their way. By providing quality parts ahead of schedule, customers realize that Alliance is not at capacity and can handle more.

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THE NEWEST TOY

In April, 2014 Alliance Innovative completed installation of a brand new Okuma MCR-A5CII double column machining center. This expands the company's sweet spot in medium to "extra large" size parts. It has a 110 x 199 inch table, can handle 60 inches underneath the quill and can take nearly 60,000 pounds on the table. With true 5-axis machining in a compact footprint, the solid double column construction of this CNC machine ensures strong rigidity and close tolerances, making it well suited for the efficient machining of general parts and rapid die/mold jobs.

Today, Alliance Innovative is a shining beacon for the future of manufacturing. Those who know him say Rich St. John is smartly aggressive, and always looking for ways to expand. The reliability he gets from his Okumas translates into Alliance Innovative reliability, a reputation the company requires in order to grow. "Going forward, we'll rely on Okuma to help continue our growth, reputation intact," says Rich.

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