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PHILLIPS SAW & TOOL TAKES AUTOMATION TO THE NEXT LEVEL WITH VOLLMER

Established more than 60 years ago, Phillips Tool Co was initially founded by Ted Phillips back in 1959 as a tool and die manufacturing business serving local customers in the Frankfort, IN area. In 1962, the company started sharpening saw blades and welding bandsaw blades, and after more than 20 years of saw blade servicing playing a greater role in the business, the next generation of the family changed the company name to Phillips Saw and Tool (PSAWS). Soon afterwards, the company invested in grinding technology from VOLLMER of America and the company hasn't looked back since.

Over time, local industries using saw blades started bringing their dull blades into Phillips Tool to get them sharpened. The Phillips toolmakers responded by retrofitting 2 Cincinnati #2 Cutter Grinders, building jigs and fixtures to hold and index saw blades from 7" to 30" diameter. A niche was developing within Phillips Tool Company. In 1981 Ted hired his son-in-law Jeff Chynoweth after serving 4 years in the US Navy. Ted taught Jeff about saw blades over the years and the business rapidly grew. Between 1985 and 1988, current Company President Jeff Chynoweth shifted the focus from tool and die manufacturing to saw blade distribution, servicing and regrinding as the saw blade side of the business was outgrowing the tool & die business. In 1989 Jeff & Kathy Chynoweth purchased the company, and to honor Ted Phillips, his name remained in the title.

Now, the Indiana based company is one of the largest service centers in the US, supplying customers nationwide. Before the 1980s and the company's first investment in its first CNC grinding center, company founder Ted and his small team were increasingly servicing saw blades for the woodworking industry, with Ted conducting delivery and sales during the day and manual regrinding and servicing long into the night to provide a next-day delivery service. The regular 18 hour working day was simplified with the arrival of a CNC grinding center in the mid 80's that provided the opportunity to automate processes, enhance quality, grow the business and give Ted more time with the family.

THE INTRODUCTION OF VOLLMER

The first CNC installation in the mid 80's enabled the company to expand its customer base in the woodworking and construction industry and in 1995, the first VOLLMER machine was purchased. Discussing the arrival of the VOLLMER CHF210 TCT side-grinding machine, Jeff Chynoweth recalls: "Our business grew right along with the state of Indiana's growth into automobile production. We started servicing Tier One and Tier Two suppliers to the automakers. We were asked to provide tighter tolerances on our saw blades and tools. This led us to VOLLMER and Loroch machines. We put the same demands on VOLLMER that our customers asked of us!"

"We needed a machine for servicing customers that were cutting non-ferrous materials that could also undertake periphery grinding, which was the preferred solution for the woodworking industry. At that time, VOLLMER was streets ahead of anything else and they had the only suitable solution. Not only was VOLLMER the only suitable solution, but we also discovered they had the best machine design, and the CNC control unit was extremely easy to use. The machine design and format of the CNC control instantly created familiarity for our staff, and this made production considerably easier to undertake. The added benefit was that our customers continuously provided feedback on the quality of our saw blades that were manufactured on the VOLLMER machine."

This switch to VOLLMER machine tools has evolved into a technology partnership that has now spanned more than 25 years. Following the installation of the company's first VOLLMER CHF210, PSAWS quickly continued its acquisition trail with the purchase of a VOLLMER CHD250 8-axis top and face grinding machine in 1997. Over the next decade, the company witnessed an increasing shift with saw blades for the metalworking industry rapidly outgrowing sales for the woodworking sector.

By the early 2000s, the woodworking customer base had grown at a steady rate, but as a percentage of the PSAWS business, ferrous and non-ferrous saws had become 75% of the business. With the demand for aluminium processing blades in the residential sector outstripping all other services, PSAWS once again turned to VOLLMER, purchasing a Loroch SW-630ST grinding machine in 2006 and an EKOSTAR760 in

2009 for the sharpening, re-toothing and chamfering of metal-cutting circular saw blades.

THE NEXT GENERATION

Today, the company comprises three main departments, the carbide tipped circular saw blades up to 54” diameter, the cold saw blades sales and service and the band saw blade welding. The 11,000sq/ft shop is climate controlled and the environment is very clean. “Over the last 15+ years we have relied heavily on VOLLMER and Loroch machine technology and support. Our first VOLLMER in 1995 (CHC025) has blossomed and our saw shop now looks like a VOLLMER showroom.”

As the third generation of the family to join the company in 2009, the current Vice President, Mr. Jordan Chynoweth takes up the story on how PSAWS has evolved in the last 10 years. “We now have distributors around the US, and we are receiving crates of saw blades daily from 48 different states. The three core areas of our business are bandsaw, TCT saws and cold saw production and servicing, which includes tensioning, straightening, re-tipping and returning saws to customers in an ‘as-new’ condition.”

“With the Loroch machines from VOLLMER catering for the ferrous metal saw blades, we once again needed to investigate a TCT grinding solution for processing saws up to a 24-inch diameter. From our experience, nobody else had the expertise or the capabilities of the VOLLMER brand. Over the previous 12 years of working with VOLLMER, we found the machine tools to be very reliable, easy-to-use, the service was outstanding and the robust monoblock design helped us to improve the quality of our saws. Taking this into account, we opted for the VOLLMER CHD 270 sharpening machine with eight CNC-controlled axes for automatic machining of carbide-tipped circular saw blades with different diameters and tooth geometries on the tooth faces and tooth tops. What was more impressive was the technological leap forward that VOLLMER had made from the CHD250 machine we bought in 1997 to the 2012 CHD270 variant.”

“The VOLLMER CHD 270 was a big leap forward for our business and a step-up in technology from machines we had from other suppliers. The CHD 270 allowed us to grind with a flat wheel as opposed to a peripheral wheel, it was 30% faster than the previous machine, it had significantly improved automation with the ND230 3-cart automation system and the build quality was much ‘tighter’ than ever before. Nobody else had the capabilities or innovation that VOLLMER offered.”

CONTINUAL GROWTH TRAJECTORY

COVID aside, PSAWS has been on a journey that has seen the 13-employee company located North of Indianapolis grow annually by 15-20%, expanding its factory space from an initial 1,500 sq ft to 7,000 sq ft. However, when the business installed a VOLLMER CPF200 in 2012 and a Loroch EKOSTAR760 in 2013, they realized the need to once again expand, almost doubling the floor area in 2015 to 12,000 sq ft. With the extra floor area PSAWS once again set about looking for more VOLLMER machines to underpin the service and support provided to its customers.

As Jordan Chynoweth recalls: “A few years back, we acknowledged that there are a lot of good saw blade manufacturers in the marketplace, but there are very few that can process saw blades and bodies above 600mm (24 inches). We spotted a niche and we invested in two Gerling GLH brazing machines and a VOLLMER CHP1300 4-axis TCT saw sharpening machine in 2017 for grinding the hook, clearance and face of saws from 80 to 1300mm (3 to 51 inches).”

The operating concept with the new multi-function handwheel on the CHP1300 makes work significantly easier and faster than ever before. The axes are selected and moved by only one module, which helps to eliminate operator error. The handwheel is also used as a potentiometer to be able to carry out speed adjustments in automatic mode whilst the automatic adjustment of the hook angle and clearance angle through digital detection avoids adjustment errors.

INCREASING AUTOMATION

While many machines at PSAWS already provide automated loading/unloading and the VOLLMER ND230 three carriage system has been facilitating the automation of up to 250 saw blades from 100 to 630mm for a number of years on the CHD270 24-inch capacity machine, the company never stands still. As Jordan Chynoweth continues: “We have changed the automation system on the 2012 CHD270 machine from the ND230 to the larger capacity ND360. This really takes automation to the next level.”

The ND 360 handling system takes the previous 3-station system up to 6-stations, providing the capacity for up to 550 circular saw blades to be loaded automatically. Not only has the ND360 increased automation capacity from 250 to 550 saws and the maximum diameter capacity from 630 to 840mm diameter, but it also permits the integration of up to three grinding centers. Something PSAWS has fully exploited by investing in 2019 in a VOLLMER CHF270, a machine for grinding the tooth sides of carbide-tipped circular saw blades that will complement the CHD270 that automatically machines tooth faces and tooth tops of carbide-tipped circular saw blades. “We updated the existing Grind Center by adding the CHF270 side grinder and replacing the ND230 loader with the larger ND360, increasing the number of carts to 6 and increasing the lifting capacity to 32” diameter blades. Both the CHF270 and ND360 were installed at the same time.”

The ND 360 handling system has four CNC controlled axes and its double gripper system guarantees extremely quick and stable changeover times. Furthermore, the ND360 communicates with each machine to ensure complete autonomy of the complete process. Alluding to this, Jordan Chynoweth continues: “We upgraded the automation system to add capacity as well as the facility for larger blades up to 840mm diameter. The investment in the VOLLMER CHF270 that was added to the cell in 2019 was for us to target a new market audience. The CHF270 allows us to build a better saw blade and gives us extra capacity.”

“By adding the CHF270 to the existing CHD270+ND360 cell, we can run the CHF270 ‘around the clock’. Regardless of whether the business expands or contracts in the future, our level of automation perfectly poises our business to deal with any fluctuation

in demand. In our area, skilled staff is also a challenge and the cell somewhat insulates us from these concerns. We are so convinced by the VOLLMER machines and the automation that we have recently added a third machine to the cell earlier this year."

THE FUTURE

Regardless of the global COVID pandemic, the business has remained relatively strong through 2020 for PSAWS and the company has re-affirmed its commitment to customer service, ordering an additional two VOLLMER machines that arrived in March 2021.

Discussing the machines, Jordan Chynoweth states: "We have ordered a CHD271 machine that was incorporated into the existing CHF270, CHD270 and ND360 cell to deliver complete automated production autonomy. Before COVID took hold in 2020, we ordered another VOLLMER topper/facer for the ND360, the CHD271 machine completed the 3 machine grinding center. The CHD271 was installed this year and this version has many updates compared to our other CHD machine. The CHD271 has the (optional) notching wheel installed. We also had a major 3-axis rebuild completed on our existing CHD270 by the VOLLMER techs. Giving us more years of service."

Referring to the CHD271 acquisition, VOLLMER of America Regional Sales Manager, Mr. Shaun Loveless adds: "The CHD271 is a variant of the CHD270 where the saw carrier has been completely re-designed, and the arbor has dampening incorporated. This reduces the existing tolerance of the machine from +/-5 microns to considerably less. Whilst this level of precision will be more relevant to saw production for the metal cutting sector than the woodworking industry, PSAW customers in both industry segments will benefit from the outstanding level of precision."

As well as the CHD271, PSAWS also had a CHF1300 arriving early in 2021. Furthermore, the cold saw business has continued to grow, even through the COVID pandemic. "During the uncertain COVID months of 2020, we updated our existing Schmidt Tempo Freestyle CNC grinder with the Loroch Evolution machine, which was installed in August 2021 with filtration and chiller."

Concluding on this, Jordan Chynoweth says: “The CHF1300 complements our existing CHP1300 and supports us as we expand our business in the niche area of large saw blades. We are now servicing and manufacturing tens of thousands of saw blades a year with a large number of these blades being manufactured on the VOLLMER machines. As a company, we love VOLLMER machines, and the service has always been excellent. Technologically, there is nothing in the industry that compares to the VOLLMER machines and this is demonstrated in our service, quality, productivity levels and also our ability to consult with our customers and develop blade geometries and solutions according to their exact needs. We always reinvest in our business and VOLLMER will always be part of the investment strategy.”

(approx. 2,200 words)

More information on Phillips Saw & Tool: www.psaws.com

Press Images

Caption: Sally and Jordan Chynoweth at the Phillips Saw & Tool booth at FABTECH 2021

Caption: Loroch machines at Phillips Saw & Tool in Frankfort, IN

Caption: Some of PSAWS‘ VOLLMER machines in their 11,000 square foot shop

Caption: The VOLLMER CHP 1300 can machine circular saws up to 1,300 mm (51“) in diameter.

Caption: The ND automatic handling system can connect to three VOLLMER machines as part of a highly efficient Service Center

About the VOLLMER Group

With its comprehensive range of machinery, the VOLLMER Group – which has sites in Germany, Austria, Great Britain, France, Italy, Poland, Spain, Sweden, the USA, Brazil, Japan, China, South Korea, India and Russia – enjoys global success as a tool machining specialist in terms of both production and service. The technological leader's range of products contains the most advanced grinding, eroding and machine tools for rotary tools, circular saws and metal cutting band saws in the wood- and metalworking industries. In offering this, VOLLMER relies heavily on tradition and the company's strengths: Local branches, quick decisions and rapid action by a family-run company. The VOLLMER Group currently employs approximately 800 workers worldwide, with around 550 of these at the main headquarters in Biberach alone, including more than 50 trainees. The company invests around 8-10% of its turnover in the research and development of new technologies and products. As a provider of technology and services, the VOLLMER Group is a reliable partner to its customers.

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