

MJSA Sustaining Members

Stuller Inc., Lafayette, Louisiana

Editor's note: *Earlier this year, MJSA announced the formation of the MJSA Sustaining Membership, a special membership level recognizing those companies that, through their enduring financial support, help MJSA to continue in its mission of advancing professional excellence and furthering the industry. Over the next few months, we will introduce you to all of these Sustainers; this month, we profile Stuller Inc. in Lafayette, Louisiana.*

THE STORY HAS BECOME A LEGEND

in the industry. In 1970, a 19-year-old Matt Stuller began selling findings wholesale on the road—first from the trunk of his Nissan 240Z, then, as business expanded, from a Winnebago. He had one main goal: to provide quality findings for jewelry professionals.

In the nearly five decades since then, his Lafayette, Louisiana-based company has recorded several milestones. They include the industry's first toll-free phone ordering, as well as the debut of an overnight delivery service that became so popular, FedEx and UPS had to send planes to Lafayette to pick up Stuller's shipments.

Today, Stuller Inc. comprises five operations: three in North America, one in Bangkok, Thailand, and one in Barcelona, Spain. From its approximately 600,000-square-foot headquarters, it provides next-day delivery of more than 200,000 items to more than 40,000 jewelry professionals



Stuller headquarters in Lafayette, Louisiana

worldwide. And its product categories include not just findings, but also finished jewelry lines, mountings, diamonds, gemstones, metals, tools, packaging, and displays. Stuller even offers digital solutions: In 2009 it purchased Gemvision Corp., producer of the jewelry-specific Matrix design software, and in 2015, the company purchased TDI Solutions to add RhinoGold to its CAD offerings.

“What a ride!” is how Matt Stuller once described that journey during an interview. “I started out with a strong belief that we had to always ‘Wow!’ the customer, so we just grew the business to what our customers were asking us, what they needed.”

It sounds simple, but as anyone who's tried it will attest, such success is far from easy. It demands a commitment to quality, continuous improvement, and above



Matt Stuller
Founder/CEO



Danny Clark
President

all, the customer experience. And that's just what Stuller Inc. has demonstrated throughout its history. For instance:

- To better guarantee the quality of its findings and mountings, it began fabricating metals in 1973 to control all aspects of manufacturing.
- To expand its customers' capabilities, it initiated services that range from custom imprinting and engraving to providing a shop set-up service for bench work, casting, polishing, or any other technical operation.

• As the consumer demand for customization accelerated, Stuller responded by offering CAD/CAM services to its customers, as well as the ability to easily customize any of the jewelry in its flexible 3C collection. It also provided software systems such as CounterSketch, which enabled retail jewelers to create an interactive experience with their customers, mixing and matching design styles with a few mouse clicks.

The CounterSketch system earned Stuller its second MJSA Innovation Award in 2008. (The first, in 2005, was for its PreForm Ring Sizing System.) That brings up another key element of the company's success: It has constantly sought out new ideas and opportunities for growth. From its digital solutions to its most recent venture into lab-grown diamonds (and the testing equipment needed to screen them), the company has consistently tried to stay on top of trends—and ensure that its customers can do so as well.

To facilitate this, Stuller has created several events that enable its customers to come together and learn. Stuller annually presents its popular Bench Jeweler Workshop, a three-day event that features hands-on demonstrations, seminars, and the “Battle of the Benches” competition, in which jewelers compete against one another for prizes, promotion, and plain-old bragging rights. (That same spirit of camaraderie extends into the company's online community, *BenchJeweler.com*.)

In 2009, Stuller created the Owner's Conference for store owners, so that jewelers could come together to discuss current issues and “recharge their batteries.”



A prime manufacturer, Stuller offers more than 200,000 products.

Today rebranded as the Bridge Conference, it strives to show the changes occurring in the jewelry market—consumer preferences, digital disruptions, the newest trends—and to provide the guidance needed to navigate them effectively.

In addition, Stuller holds regular training programs in lasers, digital technologies, and stone-setting techniques at its headquarters. And that sense of community extends beyond just the company's customers: In 2014 Stuller initiated its Earth First program, which highlights its dedicated efforts to source metals, diamonds, and gemstones in the most sustainable way possible, as well as ensuring its operations are environmentally sound.

As Stuller heads toward its golden anniversary, its relentless pursuit of quality and customer satisfaction remains unabated. Just recently, for instance, the company augmented its testing of lab-grown diamonds through a strategic service arrangement with GIA (the Gem-

ological Institute of America) to install GIA's Melee Analysis Service at its Lafayette headquarters. As Stuller's diamonds and gemstones vice president, Stanley Zale, noted in an *MJSA Journal* article last year, manmade melee has posed challenges to the supply chain—“We're reading a lot of stories about lab-grown [melee] being peppered in with parcels from cutting centers.” By locating the GIA-owned analysis service on its premises, Stuller can now give its customers “the highest possible level of assurance that we are accurately describing all diamonds being sold,” Zale said.

“Stuller was founded on a commitment to service and delivering products in new and innovative ways, and to this day we strive to exceed the evolving needs of our customers,” adds Taylor Burgess, vice president of customer experience. As shown by the GIA partnership, that commitment remains as strong as ever. What a ride, indeed. ♦