

MJSA Sustaining Members

LaserStar Technologies Corp., Riverside, Rhode Island

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. As part of our continuing series of Sustainer profiles, this month we introduce you to LaserStar Technologies Corp. in Riverside, Rhode Island.*

LASERSTAR TECHNOLOGIES CORP.

may have celebrated its 61st anniversary this year, but it's not stuck in its ways—in fact, it has continually reinvented itself. Founded as Crafford Tool & Die in Riverside, Rhode Island, the company initially sold automatic chain-making machines, linking machines, and stamped components. By 1988, when Donald Gervais and his son James purchased the company, Crafford—now known as Crafford Precision Products—had 20 employees and focused heavily on the local fashion jewelry industry.

Donald and James also saw how fashion jewelry manufacturing was more and more moving to Asia, and how much that had hurt the local economy. And while they sold their production equipment worldwide, those products were starting to reach their saturation point. Father and son knew they needed to diversify, so they set out to redesign the



“We’re all in on America.”

—James Gervais, president/COO,
LaserStar Technologies Corp.

business model. Seeing the rapid growth of lasers, they decided to concentrate on that sector. In the early 1990s, Crafford partnered with a German laser company to assemble its systems in kits. James later recalled that, when the partnership ended in 1998, he knew his company was ready to offer its own welding, marking, and engraving systems. LaserStar was born.

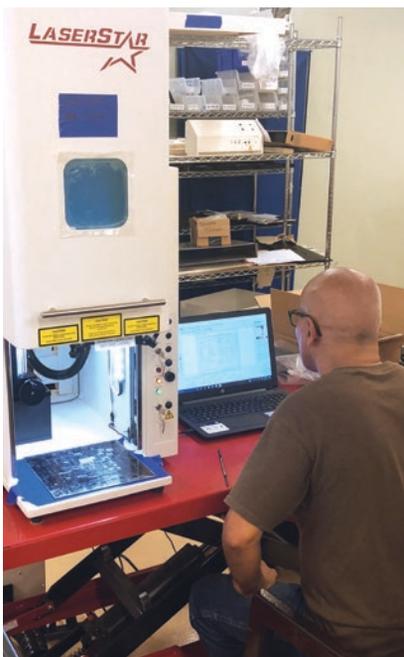
Today, LaserStar Technologies Corp. is a leading supplier of those laser systems. It employs 90 people, with James Gervais now serving as president and chief operating officer. (His father remains CEO.)

And the ties to the local community remain as strong as ever; as Gervais recently recounted in an article published in *MJSA Journal*, the decision on where to build the company's laser systems was never in question.

“I spent five years in western Europe in the early '90s, and I watched so many German and Italian jewelry companies experience pricing pressure that didn't allow them to be competitive due to lower overseas manufacturing costs; hence they moved their facilities to other places in Asia and eastern Europe,” he says. “I

saw the same thing in Providence when fashion jewelry manufacturers moved production overseas. Overnight, the industry disappeared.”

The decision to design, engineer, and manufacture its machines in the U.S. not only supported the local industry, but also allowed LaserStar to avoid being affected by unpredictable fluctuations of the overseas business costs. Today, LaserStar has manufacturing facilities in Riverside, Rhode Island (where it makes its welding systems), and Orlando, Florida (home of its laser marking, engraving, and cutting applications, not to mention several schools with laser-specific programs). Both facilities also have sales and service centers, with a third center located in Arcadia, California. To increase its reach, LaserStar partners with roughly 20 international resellers, exporting approximately 30 percent of its production through them.



Yet the company’s quest for self-sufficiency doesn’t end there. Around 2014, LaserStar invested in software production, believing software to be the crucial component to the operation of machines. As Gervais noted in a *Southern Jewelry News* interview, “We’re evolving into a software company that manufactures lasers, as opposed to being a laser manufacturer that uses third-party software.”

LaserStar is not interested in offering the cheapest product; instead, the company is after the best value. One of the ways it accomplishes that goal is by continually overhauling its systems. LaserStar’s engineers revisit the existing machines every couple of years to determine what enhancements could be made, striving to keep pace with the rapidly changing technology. The company also relies on its customers’ constructive feedback to ensure that its product lines are evolving. It follows this approach for all the industries it serves; in addition to jewelry, they include medical, industrial, aerospace, automotive, tool and die, tac-

tical, and dental.

Another way LaserStar provides value is through its customer service. Its support staff—service technicians, applications engineers, and laser educators—help clients with installation, training (in-house, onsite, or virtual), and troubleshooting. Clients can also take advantage of process and maintenance videos on LaserStarTV, the company’s video section on its website (laserstar.net).

LaserStar prides itself on such service, along with the fact that it continues to manufacture its products in the United States. “There are many companies that prefer to work with a U.S. manufacturer for education and support reasons,” Gervais has said. “We offer different levels of support that our foreign competitors don’t often have the domestic staff to do.

“We’ve talked about moving production overseas, but fundamentally it is not our philosophy,” he added. “It’s not how we want to continue to grow and be successful. We’re all in on America.” ♦