

# PROFILE

## CentreLine (Windsor) Ltd.

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*CentreLine (Windsor) Ltd. has been a successful venture for the Beneteau family. (L to R): Chris, Michael, Donald and David Beneteau.*

The last 50 years have brought great strides for CenterLine (Windsor) Ltd. The company, which started as a small tool and die venture with three partners, now provides custom designed resistance welding, spot welding, arc welding and metalworking equipment and is recognized as an industry leader with an annual revenue of \$70 million. The company's rise can be attributed to plain old hard work and dedication. Donald Beneteau, president of CenterLine (Windsor) started out in 1950 as an apprentice tool and die maker at SKD Automotive in Amherstburg. Young and ambitious, Beneteau also attended the Detroit Electronics Institute to study electronics and engineering in television. With knowledge in these two very diverse areas, Beneteau had the brains, and as he would soon discover, the business savvy to make for a very viable entity. His time at SKD would prove valuable for more than one reason. A foreman in the die manufacturing area, Fred Wigle, would unknowingly become Beneteau's business partner, and by 1957 they found themselves, along with third partner John Stephan, in a small shop on Windsor Avenue making stamping dies.

Before long, operations began to grow and soon necessitated moves to larger venues; first to Howard Avenue and then again to Mercer Street. After a few years, John Stephan opted to pursue other

business interests, leaving Beneteau and Wigle as the two remaining partners. As it gradually began satisfying customer's machinery repair needs, thanks in part to Beneteau's time at the Electronics Institute, CenterLine phased out of the tool and die business and focused on the design and manufacture of custom equipment. The company had found its niche.


The timing was right when in the early 1980s Beneteau invented some products related to resistance spot welding, conveniently around the time the automotive companies were experiencing a growth spurt of their own. Although CenterLine does not supply machinery directly to the automotive OEMs, they do cater to Tier 1 and Tier 2 automotive suppliers (locally their clients have included Fabco, AG Simpson, Titan Tool, Magna and SKD). "Their growth fuelled our growth", states Michael Beneteau, Donald's son and company CEO. One of the products Michael's father invented during that critical time, was the Dual Purpose Welding Electrode, used for welding nuts and studs on to sheet metal, normally a very difficult and intricate process. Another was the trademarked OHMA cylinder, which "applies electrode force as a soft touch so it doesn't bang the product with force, and gives the product a nice even and consistent finish", explains the senior Beneteau. A third product

would also play an important role in furthering the company's success. The Transgun, a welding gun or apparatus to resistance weld that renders transformer and welding equipment three to four times more efficient and allows the weld quality to be predictable, has been copied all over the world. CenterLine continues to supply the Transgun to competitors and the automotive industry. Continued growth of the company, brought on by products as these, finally prompted the move to Morton Industrial Park in Lasalle in 1987 where Centerline now boasts three modern facilities and 25 acres of land. The personnel list has grown to 340 employees across the city.

A recent acquisition of the exclusive North American rights to Supersonic spray technologies, a cold spray developed in Russia, prompted the launch of a new division. The cold spray technology offers time, cost and environmental advantages and allows for problem parts to be corrected, rather than needing to be entirely rebuilt. It can repair anything from rust corrosion on army tanks to beams on bridges. The beauty of the cold spray technology is that it applies to industries other than automotive, such as military aerospace, and oil and gas allowing for CenterLine to further diversify.

To remain competitive, the company understands the importance of maintaining high quality equipment. "We have purchased quite a few pieces of equipment, such as more advanced CNC machines and water-jet cutting technology," explains Michael. "Our fundamental knowledge of the underlying technology of machines allows for designers to be more knowledgeable and provide better products," he states. He also takes pride in his highly skilled workforce, citing that all workers have skilled trades certification and that CenterLine supports the apprenticeship program.

Recent years have brought further change to CenterLine. Beneteau's friend and long time business partner, Fred Wigle passed away in September of 2000. He remained active in the company until the time of his death. Since that time, the Beneteau family has bought out the Wigle family's share of the company.

Beneteau, now approaching 75 and celebrating 50 lucrative years in the business, plans to work for as long as he can. "It gives me something to do", he says. "I used to think, wouldn't it be nice to reach the golden ages and relax? But I've found out it doesn't work that way," says Beneteau. He enjoys maintaining a presence in the company and being included in company discussions and decisions. When asked about the key to CenterLine's success Beneteau simply states, "One of the first things I learned at the age of 23 was, if you make a hero out of the customer they'll always come back." With that in mind, the future looks bright. While looking to maintain its head office in North America, CenterLine is continuing to export and expand outside of the continent, and small operations have been started in Mexico, Germany and Romania. Their business objectives and continual improvement initiatives for meeting customers' expectations serve as a reminder to why CenterLine was honoured by Toyota Motor Manufacturing Canada with a plaque for "Excellent Supplier Performance" in 2005. In a nutshell they provide reliable, durable and maintainable products, something every customer looks for. And if they stick to those principles, CenterLine should have no problem attaining another 50 successful years. 

# 50 years of innovation

Customers from around the globe have come to know CenterLine for leadership in resistance welding and sheet metal joining technologies. We celebrate this milestone with our employees and suppliers who have made this possible.



  
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