



At CenterLine, actions speak louder than words.

It begins with the company's name. Whereas many of their competitors outdid each other with deep dives into the thesaurus, depicting themselves as grand and mega and audacious, CenterLine's moniker commemorates precision, simplicity and focus. With four plants spanning approximately 437,000 sq. ft of manufacturing space and employing nearly 850 employees in Windsor facilities (1,100 worldwide), no one would begrudge original founders, Fred Wigle and Donald Beneteau, if they named their company after a Greek god or a weapon of war. But that's not how they rolled. Flashforward six decades and CenterLine is still true to its core values. It seems the old corporate truism is, actually, true: culture starts at the top.

CenterLine invited W.E. Manufacture Magazine to visit their facility and sit down with a cross-section of their team: Larry Koscielski, Vice President Process & Technology Development, Jim Komar, Vice President Human Resources, Karl Mroczkowski, Employee Development Training and Safety Coordinator, Kathleen Cvitkovic, Corporate Market-

ing Manager, and Lisa Mastronardi, Marketing Communication Coordinator.

"We have more than one hundred employees who have worked here for twenty years or more, and over 40 employees with 30-plus years. For many, this was their first real job," Lisa Mastronardi says.

If there is one metric that tells a company's story – this is it.

When asked about his tenure with the company, Larry Koscielski says, "I have been here for thirty-six years. This was my first job." Eyes widen, eyebrows are raised. That's not a feat you hear about all that often, these days. "When it came to climbing the corporate ladder," Larry continues, "I took the stairs."

Larry's experience encapsulates one of CenterLine's many aspects that young people embarking on careers should sit up and take notice: longevity, yes, but more to the point – mobility. "There is room to grow at CenterLine," Larry concludes.

Jim Komar builds on that idea: "A word that comes up a lot at CenterLine is 'growth' – we're interested in our team's personal growth, their career growth. We've experienced tremendous growth as a company, with the completion of our latest facility, the Mechatronics Division."

And there are numerous avenues for growth across CenterLine's five divisions: Machinery, Electrodes, Automation Components, Supersonic Spray Technologies and Mechatronics.

Much as CenterLine has been a fixture in the Windsor-LaSalle community, and the local manufacturing industry, the company has a sizable international footprint, with CenterLine Global Affiliates (CGAs) in the United States, Mexico, Germany, Romania, Brazil, India, and China.

"It's worth noting," Larry says, "that we have a presence in those locations in order to serve the local markets. We're not shipping Canadian jobs to those locations. In fact, it's the opposite – we have a dedicated team, here, whose sole job is to support our CGAs."

In cultivating the business, leadership understands there is more to life than market share. CenterLine embraces the philosophy that a happy and healthy workforce is also a productive workforce. For instance, when greater numbers of staff members were seen, outside, walking on the road in front of the facilities during breaks, a paved path around the entire campus (at no small expense) was put in, so they would have a safe place to walk. Also, to promote healthy

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eating, four days a week employees have the option to order healthy lunches provided by a local vendor at a subsidized rate – delivered to their building – with the remaining cost simply payroll deducted.

"I remember a presentation where Michael was speaking," Lisa recalls, "and he said, 'We focus on the health and well-being of our employees for their current health today, but more importantly so they can enjoy their retirement years, after CenterLine.'"

There are no airs or top-of-the-food chain trappings at CenterLine – "Michael" is company CEO, Michael Beneteau.

CenterLine is not only interested in the growth of its employees, but in the growth of the community.

"We are heavily invested in the FIRST Robotics program," Larry says, who is the program's Windsor-Essex chair. FIRST Robotics has experienced explosive growth in the area. In 2012, there was one FIRST Robotics team in the high schools (grades 9 – 12), and one FLL (FIRST Lego League) in the grade schools (grades 4 – 8), with approximately 50 kids taking part. Fast forward to 2019: there are 20 high school teams in Windsor-Essex, 50 FLL teams. This year, over 1,400 kids participated in the program.

Developing the next generation of workers at the high school level is encouraging news for an industry that forecasts a severe talent shortfall as tens of thousands of skilled trades personnel will retire in the coming years.

"For this reason, we are committed to our apprenticeship program," Jim explains. "We currently have 60 active apprentices that work with mentors on the plant floor, attend classes at St. Clair College, and will eventually become CenterLine's next Certified Journeypersons."

A steady stream of students from the Ontario Youth Apprentice Program (OYAP) also flows into CenterLine, along with Co-Op Students from the University of

Windsor, Western and McMaster, as well as apprentices from St. Clair College.

"Many of our CNC operators are past OYAP student participants," Karl notes.

"We took a senior employee and made him their mentor," Jim says. "He is a former hockey coach and he knows what drives kids."

It is an unfortunate fact that some parents still subscribe to the old stereotypes of machine shops being a dark and dismal dungeon-like workplaces. Today, operations like CenterLine more resemble laboratories, and require employees with computer skills and creativity.

When asked what they love most about their jobs at CenterLine, Kathleen replies: "The people. Everybody collaborates. You never hear 'That's not my job'."

Karl says: "There is an open door policy. People aren't afraid to bring ideas to the table."

Indeed, among other employee engagement programs, CenterLine has a robust Continuous Improvement (CI) Program. "In the past year, roughly 2,000 'blue cards' – idea cards – were submitted by employees," Larry says. "And we're on pace to implement 1,500 of those."

"The CI Team meets weekly," Karl explains. "When ideas are accepted, our target is to implement them within three weeks."

Lisa adds: "CenterLine is genuinely interested in its employees' well-being – whether that's giving them training to do their jobs better, discounts to various health and wellness suppliers in the community, or even offering various topics of lunch-and-learn sessions on how to improve mental, physical or financial health. They want their employees to have the best tools necessary to succeed at work and at home."

Jim is gratified by CenterLine's apprenticeship program. "Just the other day, Michael was asking about the progress of a certain group of apprentices."

It is not often you hear of a company CEO making such inquiries, but from top to bottom, CenterLine does things differently. This is evident in the technology they innovate for their customers, from their high-speed fastener welding system, FlexFast™ welder, to their family of Flex-Gun™ welding guns and VeriFast™ LVDT and MicroView... but that is another article, entirely.

Visit www.centrline.com and be sure to look at their "Media Resources – Video Portal" page for industrial cinema videos. W.E.

CenterLine

Actions speak louder than words

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