



By: Ravell Trook, Communications Coordinator

Metal Standard Corp.

Though Metal Standard Corp. may not be a household name in West Michigan, the office furniture you may use each day contains metal tubing designed, bent and welded by Metal Standard. Metal Standard opened its doors in 1945 as Holland Welding Service, Inc. in Holland, Michigan and began supplying parts to Herman Miller Inc. in 1946. After several expansions, relocations and additional opportunities to supply products to the Contract Furniture Industry, Metal Standard officially came into its own as a corporation in 1954. Current CEO Mike Wiersema purchased Metal Standard from its original owners, his father and two uncles, in 1980. Today it supplies parts to a majority of the local office furniture producers. It's business is concentrated in the West Michigan area, but does supply product to companies in Indiana, Kentucky and North Carolina.

The organization grew from a small 7 person shop to 60 employees today. Each person in the company has some involvement with the shop floor on a daily basis. An excellent workforce and little hierarchy allow Metal Standard to achieve its goals of



continuous improvement and growth.

Metal Standard knows that the manufacturing industry will continue to change and the necessity of technology will be an even greater factor than it is today. Twenty years ago, it was not necessary for shop workers to know statistics or how to run a computer. Today it is imperative. The increase of technology in manufacturing, testing and engineering has made the production of metal parts at Metal Standard a fascinating process. The advancement in robotic welding machines, CNC tube bending and CNC wire forming generates an increase in production and a decrease in safety hazards. Technology may be the only way, besides customer relationships, that the manufacturing industry can stay competitive with the threat of the off-shore market's cheap labor.

For Metal Standard, it is a challenge not to have a product line and to have little control over where the industry is headed. The key to success is diversifying as times change, which will keep Metal Standard producing and supplying product to its customers.



Mike Wiersema, CEO,
Metal Standard Corporation

-2-month TEA Board Member

Professional Background:

- Graduate of University of Michigan in Engineering
- BF Goodrich; Akron, Ohio
- Metal Standard Corp., Holland, MI

What was your initial vision for Metal Standard?

When I started in '77, I really don't think I had a clear vision of what I wanted to do. I think survival was my key goal at that point because I was pretty young. I was 26 when I started and then I became the sole owner when I was 29. To say I had this grand master scheme—no, let's just take it one day at a time. We were very fortunate because we had an excellent customer base, and they helped us a great deal. As we grew, it became very clear that customer service was the key and close communication with our customers, making sure we were fulfilling their needs.

Who is your biggest competitor?

Our biggest competitor is off shore; the threat of China and Taiwan. We are a low to medium volume job shop, so it is rather difficult to competitively import lower volume product that is very bulky because a lot of these frames are quite large. As we start looking at higher volume things, it becomes a little bit easier for someone to justify importing. But at this point, we are finding, because we are very lean oriented, a lot of our customers are looking at the total value: from our

suppliers, all the way through the process to the customer. They are looking at how, by working with domestic suppliers, they can reduce their costs. In many cases, importing product in large quantities, warehousing it, and then using it from a large stock is not really lean oriented. We have an advantage there because of our geographic location and our ability to react quickly, run small quantities, and work closely with our customer. I think one of our biggest threats will be if our customers look at setting up manufacturing facilities in China, Taiwan, or Mexico.

What is your five-year projection for Metal Standard?

One of our goals is diversification, but realistically we would like to grow within our market. Anything that uses tubing is an open market—whether that is exercise equipment, automotive, consumer products, or residential furniture. We have already started diversifying into higher end residential furniture, and will continue as business opportunities arise.

How is your HR department critical to the success of your company?

The people here are the most important resource you have. Being able to actualize that resource is the difference between a successful and unsuccessful company. I think Human Resources is the key link in the communication process, the training, the developing of your benefits, making sure we are always competitive in those benefits and wages with employers in the marketplace. That's where The Employers' Association is key as well, instead of looking at national figures and national data, we can work with TEA and get very accurate regional information. Because we compete on a regional level not a national level, that's important to us.

Why did you join the board at TEA?

I've been working a lot lately with The Employers' Association and they've helped us previously, I felt that it would be very beneficial to have a closer relationship with TEA. Also I had the opportunity to sit in on a board meeting and I was very impressed with the level of knowledge and diversity of the board and felt that I might even get a lot more from the board than they would get from me. I felt it was an excellent opportunity for me to gain more knowledge.

