

Experience
Agricultural equipment

BEHLEN MFG CO.

AUTOMATING TO MEET CUSTOMER DEMANDS

Behlen Manufacturing Company has a rich history in the metal fabrication industry dating back to 1936. Walt Behlen launched his company in the garage behind his family's farm near Columbus, Nebraska. The company began producing steel toe caps for industrial wooden-soled shoes and clamps for wooden egg crates. Over time, the business evolved to manufacture products to support the surrounding farming community producing items such as corn & grain storage bins, handling and drying equipment, as well as pre-engineered metal buildings. Behlen has grown from humble beginnings to a global fabrication leader.



Today, the company has five plants across the United States with over 950 employees. We sat down with Phil Raimondo, President & CEO, and Heather Macholan, General Manager of Custom Fabrication, at their 850,000 square foot world headquarters in Columbus, Nebraska.

“The facility consists of three diverse business units: Behlen Country, Behlen Building Systems, and Behlen International and Diversified Products (Grain Systems, Strip Joining Presses, and Custom Fabrication)”, explained Raimondo. The diverse products that are manufactured range from farm and ranch equipment to components for telecommunication, transportation, construction, agriculture, and foundation support industries. Last year, over 110,000 tons of steel was transformed into finished product that were exported to over 70 countries and generated \$200 million in revenue.

“Behlen prides itself on producing high-quality, value-add products for its customers,” remarked Raimondo. *“Customer retention is our number one priority, and we try to anticipate our customer’s future needs by investing in equipment that advances our capabilities to support them.”*

A prime example was Behlen’s investment in the BLM GROUP LT8 and LT7 Lasertube systems. *“Our competitive advantage is the result of our high-quality, ‘right-the-first-time’ standards, our broad fabrication capabilities, and our responsiveness to our customer needs,”* continued Raimondo. *“Whether it’s a routine order, or a custom requirement, we take care of it. We are unique. We have galvanizing capabilities. We have powder coat capabilities. And we can do just about anything with fabricating and welding steel.”*

+ **110,000** tons

Last year, over 110,000 tons of steel were transformed into finished product

Macholan added, *“The Custom Fabrication group primarily services the telecommunications and foundation support industries; both have experienced extremely high growth in the last 10 years. In order to meet our customers’ quick ship requirements, we maintain a minimum of three days of raw material and finished goods on-hand. Prior to the purchase of the LT8, parts were produced with traditional manual saws. It became a challenge to meet our customers’ needs. As volumes increased and the product mix evolved to more complex part types, we realized it was time to adapt to an automated solution and further expand our capabilities. And that is where the BLM tube lasers that we have purchased have really helped us to service our customers in a timely and quick manner.”*

The LT8 Lasertube offered Behlen a level of automation they hadn’t seen before. With the LT8, they were able to produce parts that took three steps and reduce it to one. The increase in throughput and productivity has been astounding.

“We realized,” said Macholan, *“that another machine would be necessary not only to keep up with growing production demands, but also to eliminate any risk of downtime if something ever happened to the machine. So in 2018 we decided to invest in a second BLM GROUP Lasertube, the LT7.”*



With the LT7 Lasertube in production for over a year, Behlen has realized the benefits of using a fiber laser system compared to the LT8 CO2 Lasertube. They not only have experienced reduced operating and maintenance costs, but have also seen productivity gains on common parts produced on both machines. Macholan shared, “We’ve cut the time in half from 6 minutes to 3 minutes on a high-volume part we produce. It’s been a huge advantage for us as well as for the end customer.”

The decision to partner with BLM GROUP on the purchase of the 2nd machine was based on the

company’s experience with the LT8. “*BLM GROUP really partnered with Behlen, not only in the sale, but in applications and service,*” added Macholan. “*They came in and worked with us. They did time studies and they helped us make the decision to transition from manual cutting or outsourcing to automated tube laser cutting. BLM GROUP helped us identify what our needs were and what machine would work best for us. Additionally, they defined the necessary training for our maintenance team and our operators. So, we appreciate the whole package that BLM GROUP offers.*”

The Behlen team is strategically looking ahead to the future growth in the telecommunications and utility industries and how to manage increasing production requirements. Macholan noted, “*As infrastructure reforms and the 5G movement expands, there’s a huge potential to grow our business even more, which may require additional equipment, as we look forward to the next three to five years.*”