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## WEIDHAAS LLC/MY PRESS NEEDS

The name Weidhaas represents a strong heritage of German immigrants who brought their skills and hard work ethics to America more than a century ago. These individuals are in essence the roots from which this company has grown.

Bob Weidhaas Sr., a tool and die maker by trade had within him a propensity for being a highly skilled, dedicated man who at a very young age was already eager to learn all he could about the tool and machine industry. As a young adult, Bob became an apprentice for Mercury Tool & Die Company; it was here that he mastered the proper ways to run lathes, mills, grinders, and all general machine shop equipment.

In 1977 Bob Weidhaas Sr. started his career in the die cutting and converting industries with his position as national service technician and troubleshooter for Thomson National Press. Besides his knowledge with clamshell platen press machinery, he was self-taught in terms of diagnosing a problem and correcting it in a timely manner in the field, often with home-made tools for major repairs because portable tool technology remained somewhat basic. This was especially important to his customers because his resourcefulness and expertise saved clients money and “down time.”

Just as Bob’s family left Germany for America to pursue their dreams, so did Bob leave Thomson National Press, a company he admired, to start his own company, Industrial Tool & Machine Service Company (IT&M) in 1979.

IT&M was founded by Bob to provide first class-service for clamshell platen presses. IT&M provided innovation to the converting industries with needed products and services, particularly for the short-run market segments.

During the course of IT&M’s operation, Bob’s son Rob, Jr began to show remarkable interest in the industry. Though humble in his beginning, “pushing a broom at age fifteen,” Rob learned quickly. He, in a short time, was introduced to the operation of a lathe and vertical mill. With much practice and perseverance, he became quite adept in that position. Rob’s interest became even more evident as he watched Bob design, manufacture and sell the first programmable foil puller in 1986 and the first IT&M Clamshell platen press in 1988. He was fascinated by his father’s unique expertise in designing and building machinery “from scratch.”

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When Rob was still in school, his focus was on going back to the shop to watch and help his Dad whenever he could. He knew from his teenage years that he would work side by side with his father. At times he even traveled to a customer and assisted Bob, all the time learning as he worked.

Rob Weidhaas Jr. officially joined IT&M in 1989 as an apprentice machinist. Rob enjoyed the hands-on role that he filled in designing and manufacturing US-made clamshell presses and accessories. Yet, as an avid reader, Rob studied many business books, attended additional schooling and continued to expand his knowledge to include cad design, business management, sales and marketing.

IT&M's humble beginning as a four-person family company changed in 1992 when Jack Pierson, President of Preco Industries approached Bob Weidhaas Sr. with the prospect of forming a strategic alliance. Jack recognized the quality of IT&M's products, and Bob's resourcefulness to conceive, design, manufacture and get product to market despite the small size of Bob's company. In 1993 Preco Industries and IT&M entered into a strategic alliance; its purpose was for Preco to represent the IT&M Clamshell press exclusively worldwide and for the two companies to jointly design and manufacture new technologies for the sheet segment of the converting industries. IT&M grew to a twelve person company and designed an automatic sheet feeder for the clamshell platen press and vertical label die cutting press designed to go in-line with a web Flexo press system.

IT&M operated successfully until 1996, at which time Bob and Rob Weidhaas along with other IT&M employees merged into Preco Industries, and as a result relocated to Lenexa, Kansas.

The move to Preco provided Bob additional engineering resources and so in 1997 Bob began the engineering of a new, modern clamshell platen press, the Preco M3043. Bob Weidhaas headed up the engineering for Preco's mechanical platen press division while Rob was the product manager for this new Preco division. The Preco Clamshell featured the latest mechanical and electronic technology and was designed with an emphasis on eliminating deflection so to provided faster set-up times for the customer. The Preco Clamshell went on to become known in the industry as a high-quality, reliable and very strong clamshell press that was manufactured in Beijing, China in the late 90's, an early time to be in China producing a quality product rather than simply a low-cost product.

During his tenure at Preco Industries, Rob Weidhaas Jr was responsible for overseeing the engineering translation of the Preco Clamshell in China,

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and for the manufacturing facility and overall quality control. While Rob's formal title at Preco was Product Manager, Mechanical Platen Division, Rob also was responsible for sales management of the Preco Clamshell as well as building factory relations in China and later Taiwan.

As a result of being in China early, Preco suffered from partnering with a very large but inexperienced foreign trade partner. The consequences were dramatic, frequent price increases, which priced the Preco Clamshell out of the market. "The Chinese increased the price of the Preco Clamshell so much that it exceeded our cost to make the IT&M Clamshell in the USA," said Rob Weidhaas. The result was the termination of Preco's mechanical platen division in late 1999.

With the end of the mechanical division at Preco Industries, Bob and Rob Weidhaas decided it was time for something new. The year 2000 brought with it the formation of a small service company once again focused on clamshell presses. It was at this time that Bob empowered Rob to take the lead in the management and operation of the company. Rob's first decision was to negotiate an agreement with Preco Industries to handle all of the service requirements for the Preco Clamshell presses worldwide; this agreement benefited the customers who owned the Preco Clamshell and helped Preco Industries by ensuring their customers had first-class, specialized service and support.

With Rob taking over the management of the company, Bob Weidhaas focused all of his talents and energy to design yet another new clamshell press, the Crest Clamshell. Beginning in 2000 Bob Weidhaas designed the Crest Clamshell press with a manufacturing partner in Taiwan. The goal was the same; create a press with the latest design, material and manufacturing technologies to eliminate press deflection under normal working loads, resulting in an easy-to-operate, no make-ready clamshell.

In addition to the Crest Clamshell design, Rob and Bob Weidhaas began work in 2001 on a new product that the trade finishing sector of the industry had requested for more than 20 years, a half-sheet foil stamping and die cutting press in a compact physical size. The project is the AutoClam, their "Utility Press". The Weidhaases based the AutoClam on three different style presses with the goal of producing the most versatile clamshell press capable of diecutting, foil stamping and embossing. Not only is the AutoClam a multipurpose press, but it also incorporates a vacuum feeder that provides operators with a familiar feeding system. With the engineering phase beginning in 2001, Bob and Rob spent several months working with their partner company

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in Beijing, China. The AutoClam was engineered from the ground up over a period of three years, and the first AutoClam was delivered and installed in the USA in 2004. Four more AutoClams followed; all were installed in the USA as beta sites.

And then the bugs and unforeseen hurdles came. As with any new mechanical product, especially a new machine designed from the ground up, the AutoClam experienced many bugs. Rob decided to refrain from selling additional AutoClams and instead focus on solving the bugs and updating all of the beta sites.

With Rob's decision to stop selling the AutoClam until the bugs were fixed, the Chinese stopped supporting the Weidhaases and the AutoClam customers. This action required Bob Weidhaas to work with his local engineering resources to completely redesign several operational aspects of the machine and also address a list of customer recommended improvements. The result was dramatic; the new cams doubling the production speed of the AutoClam. During this process, the Weidhaas' experienced another, unforeseen challenge, an angry US-competitor.

The years 2004 through 2007 proved to be difficult and ultimately resulted in a termination of the partnership with their Chinese factory, and the surprising lawsuit from a competitor over the introduction of the AutoClam brought with it a new resolve to survive and thrive.

These challenges spotlight the ethics and morals of the Weidhaases. The Weidhaases updated all four AutoClam customers with new cams and other parts- the customers were not charged one penny.

One such satisfied customer is Tru Cut Steel Rule Die located in Salt Lake City, Utah. "I bought the AutoClam in December of 2004 without seeing or testing the press. I simply spoke with several AutoClam customers and had confidence in the press and the company behind the press, in particular Rob Weidhaas." Ball added, "We had a great deal of trouble when the press was first installed; the feeder simply would not feed past 900 sheets per hour. However, we were patient because we knew it was a new press design; once the Weidhaas' updated the press with the new cams the performance was night and day. - Rob exceeded our expectations, the press runs great and we were not charged for any of the updates."

In 2007, with the AutoClam bugs behind them, the lawsuit with their competitor resolved, the Weidhaases moved the AutoClam project forward with the acquisition of their Chinese partner's rights to the AutoClam,

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twenty presses and approximately two million dollars in spare parts. The Weidhaas' now have complete control and ownership of the AutoClam project. "We hold no grudges, we have no anger, we simply look forward to establishing the AutoClam globally as the ideal 'utility press' for the short and medium runs," Rob Weidhaas, President of My Press Needs LLC.

At the same time that the company dealt with the AutoClam challenges, Rob Weidhaas refocused his efforts to engineer new products in developing markets. In early 2002, Rob visited India to find a manufacturing partner for a secondary line of clamshell presses and selected a company in northern India. In 2003 the first Indian clamshell was installed with much anticipation, and it proved to be a quality, value-oriented press that was called the Alliance. The Alliance product was sold in the US market until 2005, when the Indian factory changed its focus to production and not quality; a change that was inconsistent with the Weidhaas philosophy of quality first. While the company does not currently manufacture in India, Rob and Bob Weidhaas currently support a small Indian engineering firm for clamshell research and development.

While most of the Weidhaas' research and development challenges occurred without a lot of fanfare, one new development did attract some attention. The Weidhaases opted to enter into a sale representation agreement with My Press Needs LLC to make it easier for people to pronounce and spell their name. With a name like Weidhaas, the company heard many people mispronounce it, often using unusual pronunciations, like "Wide Ass" and "Weed Ass." Although at times, they heard things that were a little more prestigious, like "White Horse" and "White House," they understood that Weidhaas was not a name that Americans could easily say or type into their web browsers.

My Press Needs LLC represents the Crest Clamshell line of platen presses with sizes ranging from 20" x 26" up to their new giant model the Crest 100, a 60" x 100" press. The company also represents the AutoClam, a fully automatic clamshell platen press, which handles a wide variety of sheet sizes, from 8 1/2" x 11" up to 21 1/2" x 32". The AutoClam has been called a utility press because of its great versatility and its ability to feed raw sheets as well as sheets that have already been die cut.

While Rob and Bob still conceive, market and sell machinery to the die cutting and converting industries, the industry's need for quality service and support remains strong. To insure world class service for Weidhaas'

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customers, they entered into a contractual partnership with My Service Needs LLC, an independent company run by Dave Mussi, a 25-year Thomson National Press veteran. My Service Needs LLC performs all service and installation work for My Press Needs LLC and offers aftermarket parts and service for all other make and model clamshell presses.

Despite the many challenges they faced when founding and growing a company Rob and Bob Weidhaas persisted. They persisted with no outside financing so that they could control every aspect of their company, including their ability to always select quality raw materials that form the basis of their high-end, no make ready clamshells.

Bob and Rob's German roots and their American entrepreneurial spirit are still alive and well in 2009. Rob is the leader of a vibrant company, and the future looks bright for the Weidhaas legacy. Rob manages on a belief taught to him by a friend and peer many years ago, "Don't worry about your competitors, build a quality product, take care of your customers and you will succeed and flourish," said the late Henry Lutz Sr.



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