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How to Be Like Mike

Lustrous' Mike Paxos Adds Several Manufacturing Operations to Serve Growing Customer Base



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A Lustrous Example of Expanding a Shop

Lustrous Metal Coatings Pins Growth on Acquiring Other Manufacturing Operations

BY TIM PENNINGTON EDITOR

Above, Lifetime Coatings was one of the first PVD shops in the U.S. when it began operations in Illinois, before it was acquired and relocated to Ohio in 2009 by Lustrous Metal Coatings.

Some people like to collect art, others fine wines, a few might be into cars and motorcycles. Meet Mike Paxos, collector of manufacturing processes.

The owner of Lustrous Metal Coatings in Canton, Ohio, has a taste for well-run operations that complement whatever his company is working on at the time. Take, for example, Canton Pattern and Mold. Back in the 1990s, Lustrous received a patent for plating on nonconductors and expanded its operation to include an architectural division, which led to revolutionizing commercial entrance handles in multiple industries, including hospitality, restaurant, gaming, retail and entertainment. Lustrous would get specs from architects and engineer the product, then head to nearby Canton Pattern and Mold to build the patterns, molds and castings that would then be finished by Lustrous.

“Because of the weight of the glass entrance doors, we were eliminating metal which would allow for lighter glass,” Paxos says. “We actually cast the parts in a composite material and our patent covers the plating of those parts.”

But making plated prototypes for architects is a time-sensitive endeavor, so instead of waiting his turn, Paxos decided in 2015 to add the moldmaking and machining shop to his stable of manufacturing processes and essentially cut to the head of the line.

“It’s all in-house now,” he says. “We have the machining, the engineering, the pattern and moldmaking, in addition to the finishing. We have the ability to turn a prototype in less than a week now.”

Vertical Acquisitions

Acquiring Canton Pattern and Mold was a similar pattern to when Paxos purchased several other finishing companies, including Hercules Polishing and Plating, Lifetime Coatings and Custom Brass Finishing, all of which added specialized coating applications, such as physical vapor deposition, nickel chrome and spray chrome capabilities.

More importantly, with the acquisition of Canton Pattern and Mold, Paxos and Lustrous gained more than just CNC machines and moldmakers. They also garnered some talented engineers who are helping even further in the engineering and design operations of the company.

That paid off handsomely when Lustrous installed a new zinc line that was designed, engineered and built by the in-house staff in just under 18 months at a considerable cost savings. Included in the installation was a proprietary software system to run the line which, although it was a \$500,000 internal investment on Paxos' part, is truly customized to the specifics of their entire operation.

"Everything is customized, from drip delays to transfer times," he says. "A lot of things we looked at were 'off-the-shelf' type systems, but this line is customized for everything we do."

It is that type of attention to detail that has not only earned Lustrous Metal Coatings a place in the annual *Products Finishing* Top Shops Benchmarking Survey but has also placed them in the list for each of the five years the program has been conducted. Only 10 other plating

Mike Paxos is owner of Lustrous Metal Coatings in Canton, Ohio.



Lustrous Metal Coatings is a 5-time *Products Finishing* Top Shop, one of only 11 shops to earn that distinction.



A Synergy of Companies

Paxos created a holding company called Synergy87 Group, which includes the various entities he has purchased over the years:

Lustrous Metal Coatings, Custom Brass Finishing, Hercules Polishing and Plating, Lifetime Coatings, and Canton Pattern and Mold.



operations in North America have also won the award all five years.

Paxos started Lustrous in 1987 and specializes in chloride zinc plating for the automotive, telecommunications, agricultural machinery and fluid control industries. His team has grown the operation steadily and, in 2000, installed a large programmable zinc line that increased production to over 26 million parts shipped annually.

The shop also offers services such as powder coating, hydrogen embrittlement baking, ultrasonic cleaning, acid pickle and oil, polishing, vibratory finishing and part deburring, as well as assembly, packaging and bar coding. Its customers include Honda, Acura, Toyota, General Motors, Lucent Technologies, Compaq, Parker Hannifin, Johnson Controls, John Deere, Toro and Honeywell.

Forming Synergy87 Group

As the company started to grow, Paxos began thinking about how he wanted to expand operations. He could hire and train management staff or he could buy companies that he knew already had good direction and management. "For us, acquisition was the smarter route to take," he says. "We could add the decorative side and the functional side without disrupting the management teams that were already in place. It allowed us to grow both horizontally and vertically at the same time."

Paxos created a holding company called Synergy87 Group, which includes the various entities he has purchased over the years. In addition to Canton Pattern and Mold, the stable includes:

- Custom Brass started in 1982 and was acquired in 2002. They started plating brass lamps for the lighting industry and have evolved into a full-service coatings provider with finishes including chrome, nickel, copper, gold, pewter, bronze, ORB and powder coating. Services include manual and automated polishing, mass finishing and high-speed centrifugal polishing.
- Lifetime Coatings was one of the first PVD shops in the U.S. when it began operations in Illinois, before it was acquired and relocated to Ohio in 2009. It provides brilliant and durable decorative finishes to a wide array of

Lustrous has over 100 employees and an overall capacity of 120,000 square feet.



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Canton Pattern and Mold was purchased to build the patterns, molds and castings that would then be finished by Lustrous.



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industries, such as automotive, household appliances, plumbing fixtures, door hardware, marine fittings, casino and gaming, sporting equipment, medical instruments, lighting fixtures and architectural door handles.

- Hercules Polishing and Plating began in 1971 by Paxos' father and uncles, and was purchased in 2012. It specializes in alkaline zinc plating, which allows for tighter plating specification tolerances and more ductile zinc deposits. Alkaline is preferred for deep-drawn stampings because of its availability to throw deeper into complex shapes and configurations, and it also allows for bending after plating, unlike its chloride counterpart.

“We called the company Synergy87 because each of the entities support each other,” Paxos says. “It is a great benefit to our customers that we control almost every operation in house. Initially, we would chrome plate our parts and then outsource for PVD coating. We shortened the cycle by purchasing Lifetime Coatings and having it done by one entity.”

New Lines And Processes

In 2016, Paxos oversaw an expansion project that connected all three of the facilities' buildings and added 60,000 more square feet for the new zinc line. That included bringing Lifetime Coatings in from Illinois, and incorporating Canton Pattern and Mold into their main campus in Canton.

A new alkaline zinc line went into production in October 2018 and now coats various automotive and trucking parts, such as headrests, suspension and braking systems. The installation couldn't have come at a better time for Lustrous.

“Three months prior to completion, capacity was already committed,” Paxos says. “We are operating six days a week at three shifts and could actually use more capacity.”



Paxos started Lustrous in 1987 and specializes in chloride zinc plating for the automotive, telecommunications, agricultural machinery and fluid control industries.



Columbia Chemical assisted with installation of Lustrous's new decorative line that features its Tricol Décor, a white trivalent chromium plating process that has great speed and excellent metal distribution while also being burn-free and reduces waste. Columbia's Colsid AP acid zinc process is also utilized, as well as some of its cleaners, including Pickle Pal Additive, Spectramate and TRI-V passivates.

Lustrous utilizes Columbia Chemical’s line of products on its zinc applications, a partnership that has grown over the years. Colzinc ACF-II is a concentrated, multiple-polyamine blend that produces brilliantly bright deposits in an alkaline, cyanide-free zinc plating process in the large alkaline zinc line installed in 2018.

Recently, Columbia Chemical assisted with installation of Lustrous’s new decorative line that features its Tricol Décor, a white trivalent chromium plating process that has great speed and excellent metal distribution while also being burn-free and reduces waste. Columbia’s Colsid AP acid zinc process is also utilized, as well as some of its cleaners, including Pickle Pal Additive, Spectramate and TRI-V passivates.

“We’re probably the lowest maintenance customer they have, as we have our own in-house chemists and labs, and troubleshoot to handle many things internally,” Paxos says.

Jeff Boehmer, Columbia Chemical’s director of domestic business, says his company enjoys working with shops as sophisticated and technology driven as Paxos’ group.

“Lustrous is the perfect example of a Top Shop,” he says. “They are a high-quality, high-tech operation dedicated to providing superior finishing for its customers. Throughout our long-standing relationship, it has always adhered to the recommendations provided

through our Finisher’s Advantage program for maintenance and process control, making it a highly successful customer in the metal finishing industry.”

Eventually, the new software system on the zinc line will be installed on all coating operations, further enabling Lustrous and the sister companies to run at top efficiencies. ■■

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Watch The Video



See The Video

Go Inside Lustrous Metal Coatings and hear Mike Paxos explain how he got his start in the finishing industry. Snap the QR code with your smartphone, or visit short.pfonline.com/Lustrous



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