

Customer Spotlight: Sharon-Cutwell



Jeff Prom, Owner of Sharon-Cutwell

Between Milwaukee and Green Bay on the coast of Lake Michigan, there's an unassuming machine shop that happens to make some of the best aerospace and defense cutting tools on the planet. Sharon-Cutwell started when World War II ended, but it wasn't until Jeff Prom took over in the 1990s that it began its trajectory toward taking on complex projects other shops don't touch.

To get that work done, Sharon-Cutwell relies on trusted partners like UNITED GRINDING North America. Prom estimates that Cutwell has roughly a dozen WALTER machines on the floor, including a couple HELICHECK measuring machines and a bunch of HELITRONIC POWER, VISION and MICRO grinders.

"We have the tenacity to stay after something," Prom said. "For aerospace in particular, these are long sales cycles. It might take years to see work come to fruition. But if you make it through, that solution tends to stick for a very long time. Easy in, easy out. Hard in, hard out."

The last thing he wanted to do

When Prom's father bought Cutwell in 1970, it was a 2-man shop. As a youngster growing up in the business, Jeff had to do the jobs no one else wanted to do. Gradually, he started to take on more responsibility, and he learned enough to know that he absolutely hated it.

UNSTOPPABLE GRIT

FOR IMTS 2024, UNITED GRINDING NORTH AMERICA IS CELEBRATING A CONCEPT KNOWN AS UNSTOPPABLE GRIT. IT RECOGNIZES THE TENACITY, STRENGTH AND CAN'T-QUIT SPIRIT FOUND IN SOME OF THE BEST PRECISION GRINDING COMPANIES.

Sharon-Cutwell from Belgium, Wisconsin is one of these companies.



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“Didn’t want anything to do with it,” he said. “I’m sure I said some things as a kid that offended my dad. But here I am now. It’s funny how life works out.”

Prom used his engineering degree for a 5-year run at Boeing, and it was there that he realized his DNA, just like his father’s, belonged in a small company. So in 1993, he moved himself and his new wife from the West Coast back to Wisconsin, buying Sharon-Cutwell from his dad in the process.

Around that same time, Cutwell had its first WALTER on the floor. “My dad knew he needed to get into it, but didn’t really know what to do with it,” Prom said. So I dove in and tried to make it productive. Got trained out east, learned how to use it better. WALTER introduced the POWER line in 1994, so we bought one of those and started making cutting tools.”

From sharpening to fully bespoke

Cutwell was a sharpening company for decades, but today, there’s no catalog of products. It’s just a mindset to design and deliver cutting tools that help their customers make perfect parts. The company’s offering can be split into two pieces: aerospace and defense drilling and high-performance machining.

“We put the complexity in the cutting tool so our customer’s job is easy,” Prom said. “The way we separate ourselves is how we stay in it with them throughout the process. Help them launch it, troubleshoot it, partner up on application development, refine it over time. We truly become partners with our customers.”

Pursuing partnerships

Because of their philosophy to develop deep relationships with customers, Sharon-Cutwell looks for partners of their own who can offer the same thing. Enter UNITED GRINDING North America.

“UNITED GRINDING has competition. Good competition. But this relationship runs deep,” said Prom. “We’ve stuck with it for 30 years because when we need help, we get it. Yes, the technology is great. WALTER is the highest quality and the highest overall value. But our sales guy, their service team, the president of the company, they all respond and help.”

“Whenever we want to get into a new type of tooling, I know that somewhere, a WALTER machine is already doing it,” he continued. “So I can talk to Cam, our sales guy, or their application engineers, and ask them what they think and how to do it. Cam knows us inside and out. He knows our strengths and capabilities. Having a partner like that who can help us develop our strategy, it’s huge. Game-changing.”

The rock-solid WALTER design

You may not know it, but when you walk the Cutwell floor, you’ll come face-to-face with tool grinders that are more than 20 years old. The company has had multiple WALTER machines rebuilt by UNITED GRINDING North America, and as Prom said, it’s a testament to the original design.



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“The base, the core of the machine, is so solid,” he said. “Revolutionary when it originally came out, and able to be modified and built upon now. Kind of the best of both worlds: rigid, yet we’re able to add the latest technology.”

That WALTER capability is what allowed Sharon-Cutwell to develop patented technology of its own: Cutwell Wave-Point® Drill employs a unique tool tip configuration that does much more than simply cut carbon fiber. It carves material to eliminate delamination, dramatically minimizing exit burrs and increasing productivity.

“Wave-Point is now used in the most difficult aerospace applications,” Prom said. “Ideal for drilling composite materials, titanium and stacked aluminum. WALTER machines are what allowed us to design Wave-Point. They’re super rigid machines, and flexible enough to do outside-the-box stuff.”



Who do you want to be?

Prom acknowledges that Sharon-Cutwell is never going to be the cheapest option. The company has a major commitment to R&D and delivering a remarkably high-quality product. So up front, the cost will be more. But over time, the lasting quality has major positive effects on total cost of ownership. And as you might expect, Prom sees similar attributes in UNITED GRINDING technology.

“If you’re looking to create a commodity product, you might want a commodity machine. WALTER can certainly handle those products, but I’d argue the machines are better used elsewhere. If you want a tool grinder that can make pretty much anything you can dream up, and also a company you can build a relationship with, I’m not sure you’ll find that anywhere else.”

If you’ve been craving a precision grinding partner with machines and people who will help you make some of the best cutting tools on the planet, today might be the day to start your own 30+ year relationship. Talk to UNITED GRINDING North America today about the WALTER lineup—and everything else we have to offer.

