

Amazing creations

Stringer Industries in Tylertown is a high-tech mechanical wonder

BY MACK SPENCER
ENTERPRISE-JOURNAL

TYLERTOWN — Perched on state Highway 48 just south of Old Highway 198, an unassuming brick office building and a collection of metal industrial buildings belie the business's strength and importance.

Stringer Industries, which occupies those buildings, is a multi-million dollar business that produces specialized equipment for sawmills, chip mills and lumber processing companies across the United States and Canada.

Though small in terms of campus and employees — about 35 total, owner Tony Stringer estimates — the company's performance and growth earned it a spot on business magazine Inc.'s list of the 5,000 fastest growing privately held companies in the country in 2017. Stringer joins just 12 other Mississippi companies on the list, including health company Infusion Plus, Plum Creek Environmental Technologies, R.J. Allen & Associates construction firm, and advertising company The Ramey Agency. The company is the only manufacturer from Mississippi on the list.

"And we hope to make it again," Stringer said.

Supplier relationships with corporations such as Weyerhaeuser, Georgia-Pacific, West Fraser, Brown-Forman, Northwest Hardwoods, as well as relationships with family-owned sawmills across the North American continent, will likely help Stringer do just that.

The company's product line includes wastewood chippers; hogs, which cut or grind slabs or other coarse wood residue; the Bark-King line of timber debarker heads; and other component parts of wastewood equipment.

Advanced technology fills the plant buildings. Not only do the machines need fewer people to run them, which contributes to the lean labor force on site, but the machines also need educated and well-trained people to keep them running efficiently.

Taylor Stringer, Tony's son and the company's business development manager, said the company's pay and benefits package are devised to draw in the people they need, who are willing to commute long distances to Tylertown.



Tony Stringer, left, and his son Taylor stand on a finished industrial wood chipper made at Stringer Industries in Tylertown.

"We have people who drive from Kentwood, Pine and Franklinton" in Louisiana, Taylor said. "They come from a fairly large geographic area ... We have some who worked for us, moved away, then moved back and came back to work for us."

Working at Stringer can be a family affair in more ways than one. Taylor said two father-son pairs work for the company, as well as two sets of brothers.

Tony noted that much of the labor force has built almost familial ties through longevity, with some employees celebrating 35, 40 and even 45 years at the company.

"The average tenure is 19 years," Tony said. "That includes several newbies who brought the average down. ... You don't usually see an average that high."

Keeping employees that long is a benefit for a company that has many complicated, cutting-edge machines to operate.

"We use high-tech machines. This is not a mom-and-pop machine shop," Tony said. "Finding and recruiting the educated, skilled, qualified people we need to work here can be a challenge. We have robotic welders, computer controlled plasma cutting machines. ... We try to stay on top of the latest equipment."

"We're falling behind if we stand still," Taylor added.

The company does still have a large, serviceable lathe from the World War II era, but most of the machinery is computerized. Most of their machines require codes or programming that direct their actions along geographic axes, or may even follow patterns devised on the Auto-



MATT WILLIAMSON | ENTERPRISE-JOURNAL

Cary Smith, left, and John-Paul Dykes operate a plasma cutter at Stringer Industries in Tylertown.

CAD design software.

One of the newest machines, a CNC horizontal boring mill, which helps to

machine some of the company's products, weighs 72,000 pounds and has to sit on four feet of concrete. A team of

four took two weeks to assemble it.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 106



Your Hometown Body Shop Since 1990!

East McComb Body Shop offers quality auto body, paint repair and windshield replacement to keep your auto looking its best.

501 Pearl River Ave., McComb, MS
601-684-4651
Hours: M-F 7:00am-4:00pm





MATT WILLIAMSON | ENTERPRISE-JOURNAL

Clockwise, from top left, Tony and Taylor Stringer; a machine holds various drill bits is the company's machine shop; plant manager Jeff Fortenberry, a 45-year employee, works on a 3-D model of a piece of equipment; Mitchell Bridges fabricates parts; the company's founders, George and Charlene Stringer; Alan Wood programs the company's horizontal boring machine.

"There's not a lot of these around this neighborhood," Tony said. "It will allow us to produce our equipment faster, as well as open our doors to other industries outside of sawmill equipment."

The company got its start toward becoming the modern marvel it is in 1964, when George and Charlene Stringer started Stringer Saw Service, a company that sharpened saw blades and other implements for furniture and box companies within 150 miles of Walthall County.

The company later became Stringer Saw and Manufacturing, before taking on its current name.

While the Stringers' customer base is spread out across North America, they said they try to buy as much of their needed inventory, supplies and services as possible from Mississippi sources, then other American sources. One grinder in the plant had to be purchased from a German company.

They also take community and industry involvement seriously, offering support for the Walthall County Chamber of

Commerce, the Dairy Festival, Tylertown's Christmas parade, Tylertown band and football team, Dixie Youth baseball, girls' softball, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, church events and more.

They also support the McComb Garden Club, Mississippi College, the Mississippi Lumber Manufacturers Association and the Mississippi Manufacturers Association, where both George and Tony Stringer served as chairmen. Taylor, a current board member, rounds out the first trio of grandfather, father and son to serve as a member of the board.

The family and company provide a different kind of support by promoting jobs among their suppliers through their purchases and making jobs possible for their customers by providing needed equipment, as well as keeping delivery companies busy.

Continued sales growth, which hit up to 12 percent per year over the past three years, will only bolster Stringer and their business partners.

"We've been blessed the last 54 years," Tony said.