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No Ordinary Story:

Extraordinary People and Businesses Shaping Birmingham

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COURTESY BIRMINGHAM FASTENER

Birmingham Fastener: Sheared, Headed and Threaded Growth for a Birmingham Original

BY MEL CAMPBELL

Howard Tinney grew up in the Birmingham-area mining community of Docena, and his father worked at U.S. Steel in Fairfield. Like so many people residing in the Magic City in the mid-20th century, the molten influence of the steel industry provided jobs, homes and more.

An aspiring athlete with dreams of playing ball for Bear Bryant, Tinney was dealt a tough blow when a neck injury derailed his football career. But his coach made a connection on his behalf, one that would tie him to the fortunes of the city's steel industry

and provide an anchor to the future.

Working at what was then known as Southeastern Bolt and Screw provided Tinney a job. And it introduced him to his future wife and an opportunity to open his own fastener business, near

Elmwood Cemetery and the Chicago Bridge and Iron Plant, in 1980.

"He would buy a mixed truck load of structural bolts from Nucor in St. Joe, Indiana and drive back to Birmingham," recalled Brad Tinney, who now serves as Birmingham Fastener's CEO. "My sister and I would spend our Saturdays and Sundays sorting the mixed hardware into like sizes and dad would deliver them to Chicago Bridge and Iron on Monday."

Forty-five years later, that business has expanded way beyond the

palettes of fasteners that the family would sort through on a weekend to one that now employs nearly 750 teammates and has operations in eight states and Mexico. The company touts itself as a one-stop manufacturer and distributor of American-made fasteners, as well as providing other custom services, and serving those in the waterworks, structural steel, industrial distribution, aerospace and defense, oil and gas, and other industries.

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Today, Brad Tinney leads a company that – like its hometown – was built serving the local steel industry but has expanded through hard work, strategic acquisitions and partnerships that have allowed Birmingham Fastener to broaden their reach and product offerings.

The younger Tinney took over the reins of the company in 2013, soon after the sudden and unexpected passing of Howard. Prior to that, the company's growth had been to expand the reach of its fastener business to new markets – in Huntsville with the aerospace industry, Texas, and Jacksonville, Florida, to connect to coastal and international markets. The company also built a state-of-the-art distribution center in Hanceville, Alabama and Dallas, Texas.

“We can take a 5,000-pound coil of steel and turn it into 50,000 bolts” Tinney added. “We have 15 cold formers, including two of the newest ones that Regions financed, that can produce 110 parts a minute -- sheared, headed and threaded. When it comes out the other end, it's ready to be packaged and shipped.”

And they do much more – plating for specific applications, hot-heading, nut-forming, and anchor bolt manufacturing on-site, to name a few.

That diversification and expansion has given the company a ready-made answer to opportunity in the industry. “One of the coolest things about fasteners is, if you look at our top 25 customers, that list represents 18 different industries, which is a beautiful place to be,” he said.

It also sports a rarified competitor list. When Tinney was tooling in the parking lot, many of Birmingham Fastener's customers were also connected to the city's cast iron piping industry. Today, Birmingham Fastener is the last domestic manufacturer of fasteners used in cast iron pipe, as well as the gaskets used in conjunction with them. The other competitors are in China and India.

By his accounting, Tinney sees even more opportunity for the business on

the horizon. “I'm partners with most of the people in the industries we serve. For the first time, every steel fabricator that we do business with is booked solid for the year.”

And he likens that activity to what he terms a third industrial revolution – with huge construction projects for technology chip manufacturing plants, energy, distribution centers, liquified gas, venues such as the Tennessee Titans stadium and more. “I've just never seen the amount of heavy construction work going on in this country,” he said.

It's no surprise, then, that when he views the future through a lens of opportunity, that he views his own company's past through a lens of appreciation. That's definitely something that extends to the company's historic relationship with its bank.

“When my dad started the company, he had \$6,000 in savings, but he had more than \$200,000 in orders from Chicago Bridge and Iron,” Tinney explained. “He went to eight different banks, and the only one that would listen and work with him was Regions.”

That connection has lasted for more than 40 years. “We've been together through the ups and downs,” said Ross Swenson, Regions Commercial Relationship Manager. “What's always impressed me is how willing they are to try new solutions we bring to table and the company's commitment to becoming better at what they do – whether that through acquisitions, its culture, or commitment to safety.”

“I like to say that we want all our clients to feel like they are the only one we have,” Swenson said. “And I feel like we always try to bring something extra to the table. We strive – particularly for Brad and his team – to bring in the right people and services, our Regions 360 approach, to a company that we know and understand and have been with since the beginning.”

“None of us forgot that,” Tinney added. “That's why – 45 years later – we are still fiercely loyal. Regions has provided me and my teammates



COURTESY BIRMINGHAM FASTENER

Birmingham Fastener President and CEO Brad Tinney – Working to be the best and safest domestic fastener manufacturer.

with the opportunity for a better life; we've been successful without private equity money. We've not had to sell shares or go public.

“We meet, spend a lot of time

together, and I share my vision,” he said, “They believe in us. It's like I said to them when making our first acquisition, we want to be the best when it comes to domestic fastener manufacturing.”



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