

# MILESTONE: Weaver Fab & Finishing marks 70th year with move to larger building

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Marian and Jim Lauer own Weaver Fab & Finishing

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When Jim Lauer and his partner decided to purchase custom manufacturer Weaver Fab & Finishing in 1998, it was an easy decision.

Founded in 1945 by Carl Weaver, the company was in great financial shape, Lauer said. Weaver had been a sheet metal worker in the U.S Navy and started the Akron company by making downspouts. When the company went up for sale, Lauer “took one look at the books” and knew he wanted to buy the business.

Today, in its 70<sup>th</sup> year, Weaver Fab & Finishing makes metal parts for the aerospace, medical, food equipment, heating and cooling, packaging and robotics industries. About 70% of its customer base is local, with the remaining out of state, Lauer said. The company has a variety of capabilities, including fiber-laser cutting, robotic welding, glass beading, rolling, press break bending and assembly, among others.

Prior to purchasing the Akron fabricator, Lauer owned his own safety-equipment company and often made sales calls to companies like Weaver. He said he’d walk out on the floor, see all the sparks and smoke, and think that kind of business looked like a lot more fun than “selling gloves.”

After Jim Lauer bought out his former partner, Marian Lauer came on board in 2012 as a co-owner with her husband. The company is in the final stages of obtaining its Women's Business Enterprise National Council and Women Owned Small Business certifications, which will allow it to be part of the government's System for Award Management and make it more attractive to customers who seek minority-owned vendors, Marian Lauer said.

Weaver has grown so much in recent years, it moved its 50 employees in spring into a 46,000-square-foot facility on Home and Tallmadge avenues. The company previously had about 30,000 square feet of manufacturing space spread out over five buildings on about four acres on Manchester Road in lower Akron.

"[The move] has been really, really good for us," said Marian Lauer, adding that being in one building makes communication much easier and has made operations more efficient.

The biggest challenge was keeping up with orders as the company moved its operations over the course of a few months. The move was complete in April.

There were a few "stubbed toes," Jim Lauer admitted, but overall the move went smoothly.

In addition to the new facility, Weaver has invested about \$1.4 million in new equipment, he said. Among the upgrades are a fiber laser cutting machine with an automated loading/unloading tower that has increased Weaver's capacity in first operations and enables it to work with many types of sheet metals, Marian Lauer said. And a new hydraulic press brake with offline programming and tooling has dramatically decreased the company's need to rework parts, she said.

The new equipment is part of Weaver's push forward.

"We're really ready to take [the company] to the next level," Jim Lauer said.

Sales seem to indicate as much, with numbers showing 10% to 12% growth each year, he said. The company is on pace for \$6 million in sales this year, he said.

Like most in the manufacturing industry, though, Weaver finds that keeping a skilled workforce in place is a challenge, Marian Lauer said. Finding precision welders is a particular challenge for Weaver, she said, adding that among the new equipment is a robotic welder to help alleviate some of the pressure of finding, and keeping, people who are skilled at really delicate jobs.

When the company does find workers who do meet the skills criteria, Weaver works to keep them.

"We offer big-company benefits with a small-company atmosphere," Jim Lauer said.

Because the company is family owned, "it truly is a family atmosphere," he said.

With the move under its belt, Weaver's plan is to continue with its customer base and continue to grow its sales, he said.