

# Southpointe is a constant in continuous evolution at Accutrex Products



By Michael Bradwell

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*Celeste Van Kirk  
Marty Beichner Jr., president and CEO of Accutrex Products, Inc.*

The arrival of Accutrex Products as Southpointe's first tenant in March 1993 was met with more than a flurry of activity to get the building completed for production.

"In March of 1993, there was a big blizzard," recalled Accutrex president and chief executive officer Marty Beichner. "The guys who were installing the wiring for the computers had to spend the weekend here. Fortunately, we had just put the vending machines in, so they had candy to eat."

On the eve of its 25th anniversary in Southpointe, Accutrex has expanded once at its headquarters at 112 Southpointe Boulevard and a second time outside of the park. Over the years, the company, which provides metalworking and sheetmetal fabricating for numerous industrial clients, has kept up with technological changes in its industry.

Accutrex began in a small, 5,000 square-foot building in Canton Township in 1980. By the late 1980s, it was in two locations in Washington County, but was bursting at the seams, when the company received an offer from Millcraft Investments founder Jack Piatt, who represented the business side of the public-private partnership with Washington County that was developing Southpointe.

Today, the 650-acre Southpointe and Southpointe II collectively form a bustling mixed-use park with companies doing business around the world, but a quarter-century ago, back when Accutrex officials went to look at the site that became its headquarters, Beichner recalled, "We could barely get into the place. The first time we looked at this lot, they had to stop along Interstate 79 and look down over the hill."

Accutrex began with a 70,000 square-foot building, which it leased from Washington County for three years, before purchasing it in 1996, the same year it added another 26,000 square feet to the structure. It later purchased another building in Arden as its operations continued to grow. Today, it employs about 150 people across its Washington County operations. The company also has two 50,000 square-foot buildings dedicated to metalforming in Lancaster, S.C.





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“We’re a metal stamping and sheet metal manufacturer,” Beichner said, adding that the company provides its services to a wide number of industries: the U.S. Postal Service, mining, steel, off-road heavy equipment and aerospace. “We also support the electronics business, but we’re building shelves and cabinets to receive electronics that are installed by our customers.”

Reaching that list of customers has meant keeping up with constantly evolving machinery – from laser cutters to bending machines used to make the components – which now use programmable, computer numerically controlled technology.

“They’ve finally achieved a rate of production that justifies investing in the cost of the machine,” Beichner said. “They’ve made them easier to operate and less expensive to operate. You can get two to two-and-a-half times the throughput with one of these machines than they did in the old days.”

Beichner said the company, which already uses robotic welders, is now looking at additional robotics for other operations as prices continue to fall.

“CNC machine tools were too expensive early on,” he said. “Robotics are becoming less expensive, and they’ve become much easier to program. But if you didn’t have thousands and thousands of parts (to make during a production run), it wasn’t worth having a robot. Now, we’re looking at a company that will rent a robot that can move from task to task” on the shop floor.

“It’s just like everything else; it just keeps increasing faster and faster. It’s all about time; we’re talking about time on machines.”

Despite the machines' ability to perform tasks without a lot of human supervision, Beichner stressed that the mission of Accutrex isn't to replace people with machines, but to hire those who are willing to adapt to the new technology.

"All the guys running the automated equipment started first as laborers," he said. "You have to have someone who wants to embrace the technology. We're not looking to get rid of anyone; we're just looking to make their lives easier."

He acknowledged, however, that finding people to work in an industrial setting is an ongoing challenge. The company has had difficulty hiring welders, but has also been challenged with finding enough qualified entry level laborers.

"Even 10 years ago, it was hard to hire people. It's really very difficult," Beichner said. "We need people, but there aren't any people. The labor market is now much harder for everybody."

Beichner said he understands the reluctance of people to work in a manufacturing setting. "When we get busy, we have to add shifts," he said, adding that working the second shift often prohibits people from participating in many events with their families.

"I totally understand that they don't want to miss something," he said.

Despite the labor challenges, Accutrex finds itself in a good place these days. While Beichner declined to report sales figures, he said the company is performing at a historical high. It turned in record high revenue in 2015, declined in 2016 along with the downturn in the region's natural gas industry, but is on track to finish this year by matching its high of two years ago.

He said part of the reason behind the success is an influx of new business being added to its roster of repeat customers.

"True sheetmetal manufacturers in the area are apparently changing their focus," he said. "We've had opportunities from customers over the last year that represent new work for us."

One aspect that remains constant nearly 25 years after the company established residency in the park is the cachet of being a company headquartered in Southpointe.

Beichner noted that one of the requirements was that any company that wanted to establish an address there had to have a brick building to fit in with the park's master plan for Class A office space.



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contract manufacturing or job shop manufacturing, they're not used to seeing something like this."

He said other amenities, like the golf course and the Iceoplex, which was finished nearby not long after Accutrex had arrived, also helped to create a buzz about the mixed-use park that went far beyond its boundaries.

When the park received a dedicated entrance/exit off of I-79, the addition "was huge" in increasing its ability to attract even more tenants, he said.

More recently, the addition of the Southpointe Town Center, with its restaurants and shops, was a benefit for everyone who works in the park, he added. "There wasn't any place to go eat before," Beichner said. "It's all been a great asset to the area."

While acknowledging that Accutrex could have spent less for a more utilitarian building somewhere else, Beichner said it sends a positive message to customers who visit for the first time.

"I know one thing. When you bring potential customers here and they see this park and this building, it gives you instant credibility. When you talk about





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