

MANUFACTURING BEST PRACTICES

WHY LOCAL EXPERTISE MATTERS

GM **Elias Pavlakos** explains what
Milltronics USA means when it
says 'Let's Invent.'

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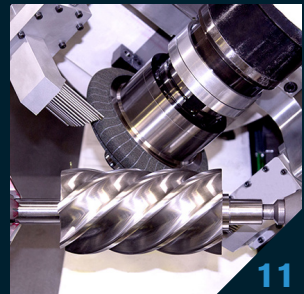
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Leveraging the Benefits of Local Expertise

Milltronics USA will continue to develop innovative ways for its CNC machines to combine sophistication with ease of use. **BY JANICE HOPPE-SPIERS**

THE MANUFACTURING SECTOR HAS RETURNED to work after the coronavirus pandemic caused many facilities to pause operations, and Milltronics USA General Manager Elias Pavlakos says there is a lot of optimism in the industry. “People are starting to get excited as the economy starts opening up again and growing, but it’s a lot of cautious optimism,” he says. “We need to make sure there’s not a spike in [COVID-19] cases.”

During Minnesota’s stay-at-home order, Milltronics never closed its 100,000-square-foot facility in Waconia, Minn., so it could continue providing customer service to its small machine shop customers. Milltronics sells its CNC machines through a network of distributors, all of which provide full support and training for the equipment. The customer support Milltronics distributors provide is further supplemented by the in-house engineers at



MILLTRONICS USA

www.milltronics.com | **SPECIALTY:** Tool room machines | **BEST PRACTICE:** Ongoing product innovation

Elias Pavlakos, general manager: “Our slogan is ‘let’s invent,’ which I think speaks to the entrepreneurial spirit we have as Americans and that carries through in the products we offer.”



Milltronics, who can be dispatched to clients as needed.

“We are a technology-oriented company, so [working through the pandemic] hasn’t been as bad as it could have been,” Pavlakos says. “Was there a disruption? Yes. Did we reorganize things? Yes. But being part of a larger organization – Hurco Companies Machine Tool Group – helped us quickly adapt because they

“Information is what our business runs on and access to it is important, so that had been set up prior to COVID-19.” — ELIAS PAVLAKOS

have technology in place that we can leverage across all brands. Information is what our business runs on and access to it is important, so that had been set up prior to COVID-19.”

In 2015, Hurco Companies Inc. purchased Milltronics and brought in a new management team, which included Pavlakos. Today, Milltronics believes it is well positioned to serve its customers now and into the future, not only because its CNC machines are made and supported locally, but also because it has never stopped innovating.

“Our slogan is ‘let’s invent,’ which I think speaks to the entrepreneurial spirit we have as Americans and that carries through in the products we offer,” Pavlakos says. “The idea is to provide flexibility to customers and let them operate the way they want to operate. We are learning from COVID-19 that there is some value to local. I think people are rethinking the importance of having a lot of expertise locally.”

A HISTORY OF INNOVATION

Milltronics was founded in 1973 as Industrial Information Controls and specialized in using

microprocessors to build CNC controllers. During its first 10 years, the company transitioned from becoming a control maker to an electronics manufacturer by integrating its control boards directly into machines.

By 1993, Milltronics was developing its own machine tool packages and earning a reputation for reliability and innovation, Pavlakos says. “Milltronics’ claim to fame is having the easiest-to-use control,” he adds.

Milltronics’ CNC machines are equipped with an interactive computer control system that is compatible with G-codes and M-codes generated from CAD/CAM software and conversational visual aid programming. The Milltronics brand includes seven product lines of general-purpose CNC mills and lathes.

Milltronics’ controls feature conversational programming as well as G-code for running CAM programs. In conversational mode, the Milltronics control helps the operator learn G-code as programs are written. When programming, users can choose between conversational, G-code or use a CAM system, selecting whichever way is the most efficient.

MAKING SOPHISTICATED TECHNOLOGY EASY TO USE

In 2019, Milltronics introduced an extra-large XP model called the VM8434XP. This machine has 84 inches of X-axis travel, with a heavy-duty #50-taper spindle, making it suitable for large, difficult-to-machine parts and materials.

The company recently debuted the TRM3016, a tool room mill that offers large



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travels, speed and power. The TRM3016 features the 9000 DGI Windows™ CNC control.

A unique feature of the TRM Series is the drop-down door openings that will allow long parts to pass through to help accommodate oversize parts.

One of the driving factors behind the creation of TRM3016 was Milltronics' return to Europe in January. "We are thinking more globally as an organization in terms of our product line," Pavlakos says.

"Going back to Europe is a good opportunity," he continues. "Things have slowed down, but we are trying to build our distribution network, so that gives an opportunity to talk to distributor partners that perhaps we may not have had the opportunity to do and there are benefits there."

Toward the end of this year, Milltronics is expected to release the Digital Set-Up Assistant (DSA) Plus, which will allow users to store drawings and set-up sheets digitally so they can be consumed on a smartphone. "As a society we've become more digitally focused," Pavlakos says.

As a result, Milltronics has been developing online content such as photo and video of set-ups and training material to help its users or those new to its machines or the machining process easily acclimate to its products. "Milltronics has always had easy-to-use controls and make it very easy to use," Pavlakos



MILLTRONICS SELLS ITS CNC MACHINES THROUGH A NETWORK OF DISTRIBUTORS, ALL OF WHICH PROVIDE FULL SUPPORT AND TRAINING FOR THE EQUIPMENT.

explains. "'Easy to use' doesn't mean simple. As the technology improves, we bring that sophistication into the control and make that accessible for our end-users."

INCREASING MANUFACTURERS' PRODUCTIVITY

As a result of the coronavirus pandemic, Pavlakos says there now is a bigger focus at a higher level on the strengths and benefits of lo-

cal partners. "I think that will bode well for U.S. manufacturers, but that takes time," he notes. "Establishing U.S. areas of innovation is going to take time, but I expect it to start happening soon." As he adds, "Manufacturing is a high-tech industry."

Pavlakos' background is in computer science and he got into manufacturing because of robots and the gratification of getting machines to do things for humans. "Computer

graphics are cool," Pavlakos explains, "but with a machine tool I'm producing physical things and there is a lot of gratification in creating things that work their way into a product. That's always been a strength for Milltronics."

The productivity and output of U.S. manufacturing has become very strong, Pavlakos observes. "There's been an 80 percent increase in the last 30-year period and it's happening in part because controls are more sophisticated, according to the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis," he says.

In addition to upgrading control technology for Milltronics CNC machines, the company has made it easy for customers to build a machine and receive a quote online, which is then supported by its distribution network throughout the country.

The company prides itself on designing and manufacturing its product line locally, resulting in faster lead times and solutions. "When you have a problem or want a feature that's not available, our engineers are here and accessible," Pavlakos says.

Before the COVID-19 outbreak, Milltronics regularly invited customers to its facility. At the end of 2019, the company completed a new showroom in Waconia that it is eager to invite its customers to view.

"We are looking forward to customers coming back in and seeing the new facility," Pavlakos adds. **BP**