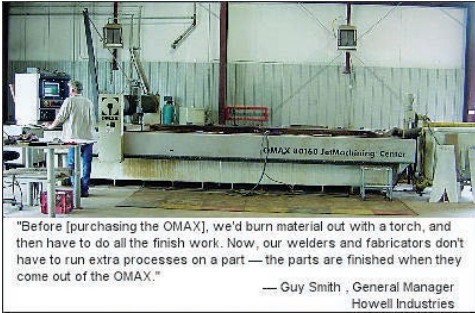


OMAX Helps Howell Industries in the Aftermath of Katrina and Rita



When Howell Industries invested in an OMAX 80160 two summers ago, they expected improvement in productivity and added capabilities, but they couldn't

For one customer, Howell had been burning plugs out of chrome pipe, cutting the plugs larger than necessary, and then machining the heat-affected zone off the part. The process was wasting both time and material. By moving the job to their waterjet machine, they have virtually eliminated secondary machining and finishing.

Smith said, "Before, we'd burn material out with a torch, and then have to do all the finish work. Now, our welders and fabricators don't have to run extra processes on a part; the parts are finished when they come out of the OMAX.

"By being able to make very precise cuts with close tolerances, fabrication is quicker, the tolerance is closer, and the fit ups are more precise. The repeatability has really helped, too."

Howell had been operating their OMAX for just a year when hurricanes Katrina and Rita battered the Gulf Coast in 2005. The hurricanes' devastation sparked a mass exodus from the region-including skilled workers. Much of the available labor is now employed in Louisiana's reconstruction effort, leaving the employment market tight.

"It turned out to be an excellent time for us to have a tool like our OMAX," said Smith. The increased efficiency and capabilities their machine afforded the company allowed them continued growth, despite the diminished availability of workers. With just four employees trained to run the OMAX, Howell is still in production from 7:00 am to 12:00 midnight daily, and they've been able to meet their customers' needs through the Louisiana labor shortage.

It seems Howell may be setting a trend in the area. A large gasket manufacturer with a branch near Howell was curious about waterjet technology, and came to look at Howell's operation a few months after they began using their OMAX. "They were impressed enough that they ended up buying a smaller machine table for cutting their gaskets immediately, and the one OMAX took the place of about three machines they were using," Smith said.

In the end, and despite employees' initial concerns, OMAX proved to be the right choice for Howell Industries. "We have been really happy with our OMAX," Smith said, "even those formerly worried employees. It's won everybody over."

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have foreseen that owning an OMAX would help them weather two Category 5 hurricanes.

Howell has been in business since 1965, specializing in machining and fabrication for rotating equipment such as pumps and gearboxes. They serve primarily the petroleum industry-there are two large petroleum refineries and four petrochemical plants near its shop in Sulphur, LA.

They had been looking to acquire new cutting technologies. Howell General Manager Guy Smith said, "We had looked at lasers, but we generally work with heavier, thicker material. We're cutting parts one and two inches thick;" such jobs are not well suited to laser work.

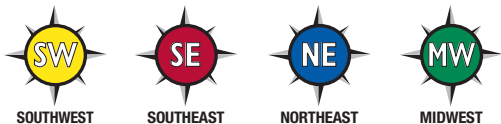
Then, in July of 2004, a customer came to Howell with a part that required waterjet machining, a wear plate with a specific, hard entry angle for a nozzle. While other job shops in the area had waterjets available, no one had a table large enough to do the job. "We decided that we needed to obtain that capability," said Smith, which led them to OMAX.

"We felt like OMAX fit our operation best," said Smith. "We also looked at other waterjet machines, but were impressed with the way the software works. When it came time to decide, it was a consensus that the OMAX was the best machine for us."

With the OMAX came increased efficiency: "When we first got the machine, people were concerned that it was going to take jobs, but it's increased our production," Smith said. Rather than having to layoff workers, Howell Industries' business has increased. "Since we're more efficient, we've been able to grow since we bought our OMAX."

Not long after acquiring their OMAX, Howell hosted an open house for existing and potential customers. "We invited a lot of different people from different industries to come and look at it," Smith said. "It gave many of them new ideas of ways to use the machine. It is bringing us work." The more Howell uses their OMAX, the more they find they can do. "It's made us more productive in work we did on other machines previously," Smith said. "Just by using it we're getting good ideas of how to do things better, and how to do new things."

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