

# Partners see opportunity in job loss, turn their expertise and vision into business advantages

By Heather Rothbauer-Wanish

Advanced Laser Machining has grown significantly since its inception in 1996. The business, founded by John Walton and Rod Tegels, focuses on metal fabrication including punching, laser cutting, forming, welding and assembly. The business idea began after both Walton and Tegels lost their jobs at a local metal fabrication business. They decided to pursue laser cutting because of the innovation it offered at the time.

After being located in the Chippewa Valley Innovation Center for 18 months, the business owners relocated to their current site in Chippewa Falls. By 2005, the company had doubled its building size, going from a 17,000 square-foot facility to 34,000 square-feet and an additional \$1 million equipment investment. The company has been successful and anticipates sales of \$10 million in 2009.

“Our use of technology and high-quality employees has allowed our company to be successful,” Walton says. “We expect to see significant growth well into the future.”

One aspect of growth is the welcome addition of government contracts. Advanced Laser Machining is working with Oshkosh Corp. and its fulfillment of a government contract for MRAP All Terrain Vehicles (M-ATVs). The Chippewa Falls-based company is a key supplier for the fabricated products used to build the M-ATVs. Walton says that the employees view the work as a way to give back to the troops that are protecting the country.

“We are contracting directly with the federal government now to produce products,” Walton explains.

By adding high-technology laser and machining equipment on a regular basis, Walton and Tegels hope to continue their work well into the future.

“We will continue to attempt to go for high-end, more difficult projects,” Walton says.



The company was nominated by Charlie Walker, president/CEO of the Chippewa Falls Economic Development Corp.

“John Walton and Rod Tegels of ALM are outstanding business leaders who have created an excellent and growing metal fabrication business in Chippewa County,” he says in his nomination. “From their humble beginnings in an incubation center in 1996, then growing to a state-of-the-art facility in the Riverside Industrial Park by 2004; ALM has achieved steady and continual growth, re-evaluating their status along the way.”

The owners of Advanced Laser Machining are grateful for the help they received when starting the company and strive to give back to the community. The company contributes to charities and nonprofit foundations in the Chippewa Valley, serves as a member of the Chippewa County Economic Development Corp. and is also involved with the Chippewa Falls Area Chamber of Commerce.

With approximately 50 employees and projected growth, the owners’ goal for the company is simple: To become one of the best places to work in the Chippewa Valley.