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MONDAY SPOTLIGHT : Allied Specialty Precision Inc.

## Precision isn't optional

Focus on aircraft parts means exacting standards for Mishawaka company.

By ALICE CULP

South Bend Tribune

6:55 AM EDT, April 29, 2013

MISHAWAKA -- Everything made by Allied Specialty Precision Inc. flies.

And yet, the Mishawaka company is grounded in its focus as an aerospace component manufacturer. Most planes in the United States contain parts made at the plant.

"We have parts that go in fuel control, brakes and the landing systems," said Pam Rubenstein, Allied Specialty's owner and chief executive officer. "Typically our parts are small. We measure to a millionth of an inch, because when it flies, it's either right or it's dangerous."

The company opened more than 50 years ago as a screw machine shop in Mishawaka. Within 10 years, it had expanded to include general precision machining and assemblies. It continued to grow and, in 1967, moved to its current location on East Lowell Avenue, where it has 26,000 square feet of manufacturing space.

Rubenstein started working for the company in the 1980s as a receptionist. She went on to do

other jobs at the company including managing the office and

ordering raw materials, and, in 2005, decided to buy it. She was nervous the day she announced her decision to the rest of the staff, but said no one seemed surprised or upset. Several employees told her they had expected her to eventually buy the company.

At that point, the biggest question, she said, was how to become certified as a woman-owned business.

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"Our customers wanted me to do that right away, because it's good for the customers," she said.

It took about a year just to collect all the documentation the National Women Business Owners Corp. required for certification.

"It was a long process. They wanted to make sure that the company was not woman-owned in name only, but that the woman is actively involved in daily operations," Rubenstein said, explaining that she had to show that she was the contact person for the bank and the one to sign paychecks.

The organization even sent in interviewers to talk to staff about her role in the company and to check to see if she had an actual office. She was questioned about any equipment she wanted to acquire, what it would do and why she needed it.

"I couldn't just say, so-and-so says we need it," she said. "I had to prove that I not only was involved in daily operations, but that I understood and knew the company. It was a very interesting process."

It was also fun, she said, explaining that she is passionate about her company.

"Everything is made right here," she said, explaining that all of the company's supplies and components are American-made.

Allied Specialty is a licensee of Honeywell Aircraft Landing Systems, and Honeywell is its biggest customer. Most of Allied Specialty's military jobs -- such as making brakes for the B-52 bomber -- come through this connection.

In 2008, the company was featured in American Machinist -- an online source of product news and technology trends for contract manufacturers and job shop leaders -- as one of the top 10 precision machine shops in the country that year.

Like many manufacturers, the company faced the challenge of staying profitable and open during the economic downturn of the past several years, but it survived and thrived, Rubenstein said.

She will speak about Allied Specialty's best practices and successes in May at the National Women Business Owners Corp. conference in Palm Beach, Fla. She is looking forward to the event and the chance to spend time with other women business owners -- especially those in manufacturing.

"There aren't many of us," she explained.

She is also looking to the future of the industry, concerned about another challenge it faces: an aging work force.

"A lot of the experienced operators and machinists are in their 60s and 70s," she said. "Thank goodness we have them, but they will want to retire someday and who's going to take that over?"

There is a public perception, she explained, that there is no manufacturing left in the United States.

"But it is a very good trade and a very good living," she said. "When you drive by here in the spring, summer and fall, what you see in the parking lot are Harleys and Bass boats. That tells a lot about a company and its earning potential."

In the past, Allied Specialty has worked with several education programs and has even offered high school and college students internships or summer jobs. Rubenstein wants to share a passion for doing "cool things with your hands" with the next generation.

"You take a 12-foot bar of steel and make these amazing little parts that control the fuel in an aircraft engine," she said. "That's life or death."

She's had some success at sparking that passion. Several former interns have become full-time employees at Allied Specialty. In fact, the current president of the company started just that way.

"I'm really lucky to have the people around me that I do," Rubenstein said. "I have a great management team, and together we do a good job."

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## **Allied Specialty Precision Inc.**

### **Owner: Pam Rubenstein**

**Address:** 815 E. Lowell Ave., Mishawaka

**Phone number:** 574-255-4718

**Website:** [www.aspi-nc.com](http://www.aspi-nc.com)

**Business:** An airline component manufacturer

**Number of employees:** 65

**History of the business:** It was founded in 1954, and Rubenstein bought it in 2005.

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