

# BUSINESS COURIER

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## ENTERPRISE

# Putting the pedal to metal

Lance Williams  
Courier Staff Reporter

Dan Cunningham said it's an eternal struggle for manufacturers.

"Every day, my customers try to turn my products into a commodity, and I try to turn our products into very specific things," said Cunningham, who is the sixth-generation president and CEO of Long-Stanton Manufacturing Co. in West Chester.

Once a product becomes a commodity, someone -- especially manufacturers in China or Mexico -- will come along and make it much, much cheaper, Cunningham said.

So Long-Stanton, traditionally a manufacturer of stamped and precision sheetmetal parts, decided to zig while others zag. In times of global competition and an industry-wide slowdown, staying unique means staying alive, whether that means making parts for cash drawers, gasoline nozzles, garage doors or air compressor tanks.

Cunningham, who has been at the company since 1982, said he worries less about the latest techniques and methods, and more about the needs of his customers.

"You can't prevent innovation," Cunningham said. "Don't worry about predicting the future, focus on doing it today."

So the company is now taking on projects such as a 6,000-bottle metal wine rack that was placed in the wine cellar of a Los Angeles home this past October. The rack, which costs \$100,000, is a prime example of Long-Stanton's bid to stay competitive by focusing on finding customers who trust his company's products and are willing to let Long-Stanton work to fill their needs.



**MARK BOWEN/COURIER**  
"Every day, my customers try to turn my products into a commodity, and I try to turn our products into very specific things," said Dan Cunningham, president of Long-Stanton Manufacturing in West Chester.



**Long-Stanton**, founded in 1862, once stamped coins used as currency during the Civil War.

"When you find someone who tells you what they want, you hold on to them," Cunningham said.

It's an approach that seems to be working for one of the region's oldest manufacturers. Founded by John Stanton in 1862, the company, then known as the John Stanton Co., began by stamping metal coins to be used as Civil War-era currency and eventually became a leading producer of the coins. In 1955, Stanton's company joined with Long Manufacturing to become Long-Stanton Manufacturing.

But all that doesn't mean the company is living in the past.

Sales were up 12 percent this year, and the factory has seen productivity gains of 22 percent over the previous year.

Long-Stanton has been able to improve by focusing on "Kaizen," a Japanese word for continuous improvement, said Ray Atiyah, president of MMS, a company that helps manufacturers and other companies improve their operations.

"They were running the company as a nice, well-run small business," said Attiyah, who has been working with Long-Stanton for nearly six years.

At that time, manufacturers were in good financial times, when there was less incentive for making improvements.

"They decided, 'Before we have to improve, let's improve.'" Attiyah said.

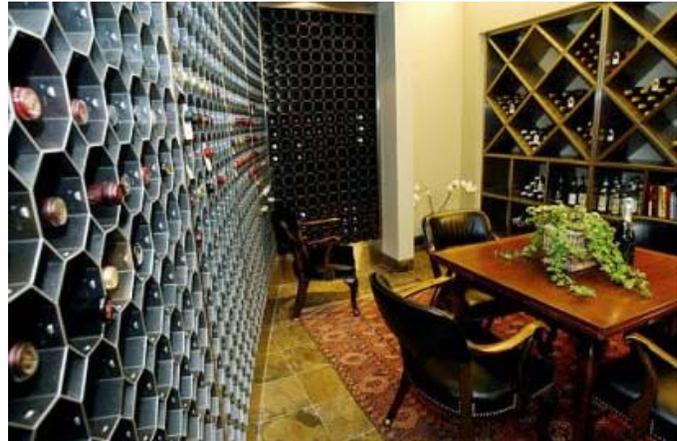
He said the company diversified its offerings to customers, and began working on Kaizen principles, which focus on increasing productivity, eliminating waste and bottlenecks and improving morale and safety.

Cunningham also said Long-Stanton began to focus on its strengths and contract out with other companies on processes that weren't as cost-effective for Long-Stanton.

"Outsourcing is a major trend that is benefiting us tremendously," Cunningham said.

The company has annual sales of about \$10 million, but Cunningham would like to see those numbers double within five years.

Cunningham, who became CEO in 1998, said 85 percent of Long-Stanton's work is specifically made for customers, while the rest are proprietary parts. The company occupies about 64,000 square feet spread across two buildings.



COURTESY OF LONG-STANTON MANUFACTURING  
The company produced a wine rack for a California residence that holds 6,000 bottles.

And Cunningham said companies like Long-Stanton can't gripe about global competition, because customers are under many of the same pressures in their own industry. He also said global competition and innovation will happen regardless of steps his company takes.

"I can't focus on things that I can't control," Cunningham said.

What Cunningham said he can control is how his company operates. He said the internal focus has been on fostering a culture of continuous improvement.

The company has aggressive production goals and checks the progress every hour, and those goals are set throughout the company -- from the factory floor to sales.

On the factory floor, the company worked hard to beef up the incentives for meeting goals. Cunningham said that once a quarter, goals are measured by the "hamburger" line and the "steak" line. Hitting the lower targets means supervisors buy hamburgers for everyone on the floor, while hitting the higher targets yields a juicy steak.

He said the last few years have been focused on developing lean manufacturing techniques on the factory floor. He said he's also worked to keep employees more engaged in shepherding the company's growth.

Cunningham said employees now are more educated today about companies and the global economy now than they were even two decades ago.

"The American worker seems to be much more educated in the way the world economy is going," he said.