

# METALTEK LASER

## Quebec job shop's success based on customer service

By Danny Kurcharsky

**M**etaltek Laser may have some of the most advanced metalworking technology in Quebec, but good old fashioned customer service is what really sets the company apart, its' owners insist.

The 10-employee shop, which will celebrate its' fourth birthday in July, is co-owned by brothers Sylvain and François Vouligny. Sylvain is responsible for bids and purchasing and François handles production.

Metaltek Laser is located in Bécancour, near Trois-Rivières and about 100 miles from Montreal. It specializes in laser cutting and sheet metal bending, primarily for clients in agriculture, forestry and mining, and has two 4,000W Mitsubishi machines for CNC laser cutting.

According to Sylvain Vouligny, the fact the company has a new generation Mitsubishi model (ML3015 LVPlus II) as well as robotic capabilities is unique to Quebec. "I don't understand why we're the only ones in Quebec who have it. It's a really good machine." He calls the machine the most efficient on the market, because it provides high speed and unmatched laser cutting accuracy. "One of the reasons we chose Mitsubishi is that the company manufactures 100 per cent of the machine's parts. They know their machines. That's important."

Adds François Vouligny: "If you're not looking for trouble, buy the Mitsubishi." He cites its' reliability and requirement for much less maintenance than other models. Some companies "need an inventory of \$50,000 in spare parts," to keep their machines running, he says.

Still, service trumps machinery, Sylvain Vouligny says. Customer service at Metaltek Laser includes such old-time features as having a human being answer the phone— there's no voice mail—and working long hours. One of the brothers is in the shop by 6:30 every weekday morning, and somebody is usually around until 7 or 8 pm. "We're from the farming world, so it's part of our lives," Sylvain says of the long hours.

"One of our strengths is that we care about our clients. We know their names.

Whenever we have a chance to leave the plant, it's to meet customers. That's something they really appreciate." The brothers

attend machinery trade shows three or four times a year.

A benefit of trade shows is that potential clients can be sent to existing clients a few feet away who can give Metaltek Laser positive reviews. "When we meet a potential customer, we can tell him 'go see him, him and him.' There's no better marketing than a client who can say 'You can trust those guys.'"



**Sylvain Vouligny, left, with his brother Francois. The brothers have big plans for their company's future. They're looking at purchasing new equipment for oxyfuel metal cutting and multitooling capabilities, like beveling.**

Metaltek Laser got its start in the summer of 2007. The brothers had worked together at a John Deere dealership, with Sylvain as a sales manager and François as parts clerk, but had long dreamed of running their own business. After gaining their chops at other metalworking shops, they set out to do so.

They found a 4,000 sq ft building with the 20ft ceilings they were looking for, and bought it. By July 2007, they were in business doing work for a snow removal equipment firm. "We were able to start off with money in our pockets," Sylvain says. First-year sales hit \$900,000.

Big changes came in 2009, when the growing company bought the Mitsubishi machine, which Sylvain had seen at trade shows, and more than tripled its facility in size to 14,000 sq ft, at a total cost of \$1.25 million.

They did so with financial assistance of \$633,150 from the Quebec government, in the form of a \$201,900 loan from the Ministry of Economic Development, Innovation and Export, and a loan guarantee of \$431,250 from Investissement Quebec's small and medium sized business financing program.

The production line is now completely

automated, meaning the company can now run on nights or on weekends without employees on site. The robot has easily saved the company 10 jobs, Sylvain says. "We have very few employees for the number of tons of material we generate— that's where we win."

The machine's reliability, translates into being able to offer lower rates than the competition, François adds.

That reliability includes exceptional service in the form of technical support from Mitsubishi, Wood Dale, IL, when it is (only occasionally) needed. "They really listen to their customers," Sylvain says. "It's easier for me to get service from Chicago then from someone in Trois-Rivières, 30 minutes away."

What really differentiates the company is fast service, François says. "We can do everything within two days," compared to competitors who, he says, take a week or longer to deliver the goods.

In the zero inventory and just-in-time environment that prevails today, it's important that clients receive their orders as quickly as possible, Sylvain adds.

Aside from attending trade shows, the company gets lots of business from word of mouth and its' website. "We put a lot of money into the Web. It's the new way of doing business, so we're taking advantage of it," Sylvain says.

Sales should hit about \$3.5 million this year, almost double 2010 sales. About 80 per cent of business comes from Quebec, and the rest from Ontario and the Maritimes. The company now has about 350 clients.

Metaltek Laser has big plans for the future. "We're looking at bringing in new equipment that will revolutionize our market," Sylvain says. The new equipment will provide oxyfuel metal cutting and multi-tooling capabilities, including beveling. There's very little beveling offered in Quebec, says Sylvain.

Obtaining the new machinery will give Metaltek Laser the opportunity to provide more services and chase markets that can't currently be serviced, such as the nearby Marmen wind energy facility in Trois-Rivières. It will also require another plant expansion and the hiring of a few more employees.

That should all happen next year, Sylvain says.