

STRONG AS STEEL

70 years later, Precision Marshall still making customers its priority

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Jack Milhollan knows precisely when and where Precision Marshall Steel was born. “July 1, 1948,” he said. “My father started it on May Avenue in Washington, in the garage of a small house. His first office was our dining room table.”

There was no doubting Thomas R. Milhollan when he told his son of this very humble beginning.

“My father said it was a myth that the company was founded on a shoestring ... that, in fact, it was on a broken shoestring.”

Jack chuckled mildly, for his dad’s firm did not trip on that frayed shoestring. The enterprise eventually gained a foothold, established a footprint, then became a national leader.

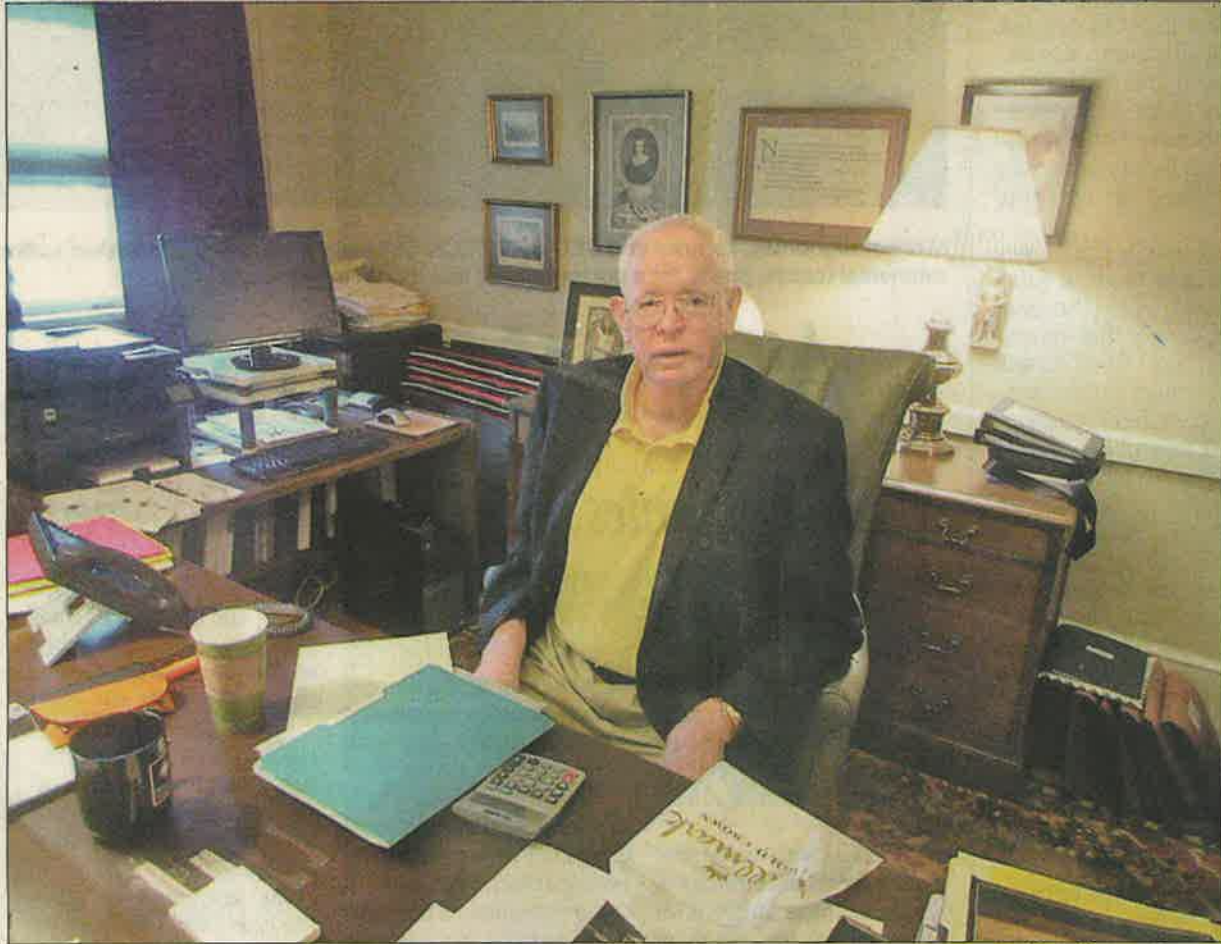
Precision Marshall, the top supplier of pre-finished tool steels in the United States, is 70 years old and showing vigor. Its headquarters sit atop Berry Road in South Strabane Township, near the Strabane Square shopping complex, and easily spied by interstate commuters along 70 and 79.

The company purchases raw steel and uses machine applications to provide tool-and-die steels primarily for the auto, appliance, aerospace and defense industries.

“That’s about 98 percent of our market,” said Milhollan, 69, the president and chief executive officer, who took over Precision Marshall on its 40th anniversary – July 1, 1988.

He said the firm conducts business throughout North America, including Canada and Mexico. The company has a payroll of 75, most of whom work in South Strabane. There are 17 employees at its national distribution center in Bolingbrook, Ill. – outside Chicago – and one at a Hartford, Conn., warehouse.

People – those Precision Marshall pays and those it serves – are the core of the company’s operations, Milhollan said. He and his fa-



RICK SHRUM/OBSERVER-REPORTER

For 30 years, Jack Milhollan has been president of Precision Marshall, the company his father started in 1948.



ther have always believed in treating both sides well.

“There are two things we do: Have a belief in the potential of people and how to treat them, and make customers a priority of our business. Those go hand in hand.

“We pay a lot of attention to making sure people in the company are well trained. We try to make each person on the payroll the best they can be.”

Milhollan learned a lot from his late father, who was born and bred in Monessen, a Depression-era graduate of the high school.

“He had a sister living (in Washington) and he thought there were better job opportunities here,” the son said. So Thomas moved to Washington and secured a full-time job at Jessop Steel. Eight years later, he launched his

own business.

The mid-1960s was a pivotal period for Precision Marshall, Jack Milhollan said. Not only did the company move into its current location then, but it forged a fortuitous association with Bethlehem Steel. “We did machining services for them that was the impetus for growth through the ‘60s into the ‘70s.”

Precision Marshall also benefited from the 1966 purchase of Kid Drawn Steel in Aliquippa. “That expanded the company’s horizons into a different part of steel production – coil drawing,” Milhollan said.

He was a kid at that time, a lanky lad standing 6 feet 3 and now living within the shadows of Trinity High School. Milhollan, class of ‘67, was a Hillers basketball star who, after graduation, attended Ohio University and played hoops for two years before wrecking a

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knee. Baseball Hall of Famer Mike Schmidt was a campus contemporary.

Milhollan remains passionate about basketball, displaying a half-dozen NBA photos in his office. Legends Wilt Chamberlain and Bill Russell are two of his favorites.

Taking over his dad’s company 30 years ago could have been a daunting prospect, but Jack was comfortable with the transition. “I’ve always believed in our success. I never doubted it for a minute.”

He isn’t second-guessing

now, but does have a concern: the tariffs President Donald Trump has imposed. Milhollan described them as “a disruptive factor” in Precision Marshall’s operations. “That’s resulted in passing costs onto customers that they otherwise wouldn’t have. And it can result in short supply, although that hasn’t happened yet.”

For seven decades, his company has weathered storms, especially those in the formative years. It is striving to do the same with tariffs. In the meantime, Jack Milhollan will continue to draw upon his experiences and the business acumen of his predecessor, the man who mended that broken shoestring.

“My advice for any business,” Jack said, “is to take care of your customers and they will take care of you.”

So it has been at Precision Marshall.