

# Augusta company wins international acclaim for tool design

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By Jessica Lowell Kennebec Journal

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AUGUSTA — Three weeks of work on a tool for client earlier this year has netted Brian Beland international recognition for his company.

But the owner of KV Tooling Systems is hoping to capitalize on this moment in the spotlight to help people to understand what the machining industry is and help recruit more people to work in it.

“It’s hard to find machinists in general, but it’s really hard to find people who do this kind of machining,” Beland, 52, said. “There’s no classes for it.

“This is a foundation trade,” he added. “All the other trades are built upon manufacturing stuff.”

KV Tooling Systems has built its business on creating tools for specific uses and sharpening tools already in use.

To the uninformed eye, the company’s prizewinning cutting tool looks like fancy drill bit, with sculpted edges and sharp points. The carbide tool is used to cut precision machine parts. In this case, the tool was created for a customer who needed to inscribe grooves in aluminum military vehicle suspension components.

Before the company approached KV Tooling, it needed six different tools to cut grooves into the component. The design, which Beland’s company executed, combined the functions of six different tools.

“The object of the game is to make things faster and more efficient,” Beland said. “That drives down the costs and makes you more competitive.”

KV Tooling uses the ANCA line of CNC machinery. CNC stands for computer numerical control. CNC machines use computer data and software to automate the actions of the machine to cut out parts. The ANCA machines are designed specifically to make cutting tools.



Brian Beland, the owner of KV Tooling Systems, holds the rotary cutting tool on Oct. 2. His Augusta firm’s creation won a Tool of the Year award for a custom tool.  
*Kennebec Journal photo by Andy Molloy*

ANCA, which is based in Australia with a U.S. branch headquartered in Michigan, now sponsors an international tool-making competition among its users.

The Tool of the Year competition starts with gaining votes on Facebook. From a field of 29 entrants, five would go on. Because of a tie in voting, six tools from companies in Turkey, Israel, Poland and the United States actually made the final cut.

Judging took place at EMO, the world's largest industrial trade show, in September in Hanover, Germany. Each contestant was judged on five criteria — craftsmanship, tool size tolerance, conformation to the tool tolerance, complexity and surface finished.

KV Tooling's took first in all five categories.

On Monday, Russell Riddiford, president of ANCA USA traveled from Wixom, Michigan, to Augusta to present its award and plaque.

This is the second year of the contest. From ANCA's perspective, the contest helps to promote its own line of equipment. But Riddiford said the contest also brings together a community of users together to compete against one another.

"It's competition in a positive sense to acknowledge and admire the art of tool-making," Riddiford said.

Aside from the prizes, which includes a trip for two to Melbourne, Australia, for a tour of the international headquarters and some sightseeing, the contest is a way to celebrate the creativity of tool designers and create a community.

"You have competitors of KV Tooling actually rooting for them to win," Riddiford said. "While you're competing for the same customer base, you're sharing knowledge to a certain extent. It's very healthy from what I saw."



The Tool of the Year award-winning rotary cutting tool that KV Tooling Systems created is seen on Oct. 2. *Kennebec Journal photo by Andy Molloy*



Russell Riddiford, president of ANCA USA, presented an award and plaque to KV Tooling Systems of Augusta on Monday for creating the ANCA Tool of the Year. *Kennebec Journal photo by Jessica Lowell*

About half the business that KV Tooling does is sharpening tools used by manufacturing companies throughout New England and beyond. The other half is making custom tools for manufacturers to use in fabricating parts.

Beland started his career as a machinist after graduating from Cony High School Central Maine Vocational Technical in Auburn, and he worked for 18 years before starting his own business in 2002.

“It was how intrigued I was with the cutting grinders,” he said, “especially the computerized ones — the programming, the operation, the software behind them.”

When he wasn't out on the production floor machining parts, he was watching others using the cutter-grinder.

“I would always go in and watch the guy run them, and how cool they are,” he said. “Then I noticed they were strapping tools to a pallet and they were shipping them out. I asked where they were going and they said they couldn't keep up with the demand and they were shipping them down South.”

That's when the light bulb went off and Beland realized there was a need for the work to be done here. He did some research, bought a machine and put it in his basement. From there, he's grown to three machines and six employees in the converted service station on Northern Avenue that his grandfather built.

With three machines on the floor, Beland cannot add another and expand his business. He's been looking around the region for a new space. So far, the search has been fruitless.

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