

Customer Spotlight: Abrasive West



Amanda Kummer, President of Abrasive West, LLC

Amanda Kummer grew up running around machine shops in Roselle, Illinois. Her grandfather had a tool and die shop, and her grandmother was the receptionist there. After her dad built his first shop in 1980, Amanda and her sister roller skated on the floor before the machines moved in.

"I learned how to drive in the parking lot. I worked summers in reception or filing for accounts payable," she said. "When my dad came home from work, I'd give him a hug and he'd smell like the shop. So when I smell coolant and oils, I'm home."

For all those reasons, it's no surprise that Amanda is now the President of Abrasive West LLC in Roselle, Illinois. Thanks to a skilled workforce and very low turnover, the company has made high-quality parts and delivered them on time for decades. And now, it's set up for exciting growth after the arrival of three BLOHM surface and profile grinding machines.

Starting on the floor

Amanda did what many kids do when their parents own a business: she worked summer jobs and popped in regularly, helping out in various departments. But her trajectory as owner of Abrasive West really started to solidify when she was in college. "My dad and I had always talked about getting involved in the business. One summer, I told him on I wanted to be on the other side of the door and understand life on the shop floor."

UNSTOPPABLE GRIT

FOR IMTS 2024, UNITED GRINDING NORTH AMERICA IS CELEBRATING A CONCEPT KNOWN AS UNSTOPPABLE GRIT. IT RECOGNIZES THE TENACITY, STRENGTH AND CAN'T-QUIT SPIRIT FOUND IN SOME OF THE BEST PRECISION GRINDING COMPANIES.

Abrasive West, from Roselle, Illinois is one of these companies.



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She was put on a manual grinding machine that summer, running one of the final operations on carbide inserts. She got to know the business, and everyone around her as well. "My biggest takeaway from that summer was a huge appreciation for the operators. They're so great at what they do, and they're masters of this art form. All of us have skills that complement each other at Abrasive West, and that's one big reason we've been successful over the years."

Building the culture

Amanda took over as Abrasive West's owner in 2021, but her dad had been passing lessons down to her in the decades prior. Something Amanda got from her father is a fierce loyalty to the people working for her. "You go through life with these people over 20, 30 years or more," she said. "I want my team to know that they won't be cut loose if they're having challenges. We will take care of them, coach them and stand by each other when times get tough."

"Our team knows that close enough isn't good enough around here. When you're talking about aerospace parts, they have to be perfect."



Amanda and Phil Wiss, Regional Sales Manager at UNITED GRINDING North America, discuss a potential grinding application

Women in manufacturing

The manufacturing industry is witnessing a significant increase in the number of women in senior leadership. This fosters a more balanced and dynamic workforce, creates new opportunities, and contributes to the overall growth and sustainability of the manufacturing industry.

Amanda is part of a close-knit group of women who own manufacturing companies. Five of them have a monthly call and a group text string. "If we run into a challenge, whether it's working with family, being a female in this industry or just a question about running the business, this tribe helps each other. It's a phenomenal group of women who are on the same path that I am."

UNITED GRINDING North America enters the facility

Amanda and her team have had plenty of conversations about the future of the company over the past year, and two key points emerged.

First, Abrasive West needed to diversify its portfolio. It's a well-known part-maker for the medical industry, but nearly 100% of the business was devoted to that sector. "We now have projects in dental, aerospace and we're looking at IGT," she said. "The BLOHM we purchased will be doing a bit of everything, but we're definitely putting it to work on parts for the aerospace industry."

Second, Amanda and her team have noticed how quickly the industry changed, and how imminent retirement is for many skilled workers. "We explored both new and used options, but ultimately chose UNITED GRINDING for the peace of mind. Our BLOHM likely be running good as new 10 years from now, but when it needs maintenance or a repair, we'll have someone from UNITED GRINDING's Customer Care team who was fully trained on the PROFIMAT XT."



Surgical instrument pad



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PROFIMAT power

Prior to IMTS 2022, Phil Wiss, Regional Sales Manager at UNITED GRINDING North America, reached out to Amanda and let her know the PROFIMAT XT would be on the show floor. He knew the machine was a fit for where Abrasive West wanted to go.

"The PROFIMAT checks all of their boxes," Phil said. "When Abrasive West buys a machine, they're all-in on it. They ride it hard for 20+ years. They didn't just get a top-of-the-line machine, they also got a team that will help them over the years. The machine platform and Customer Care is a tough combo to beat."

Amanda concurred. "After seeing it at IMTS, we thought it was a slam dunk to let the PROFIMAT XT take us into the next chapter of Abrasive West," she said. "It increases our capacity and our ability to provide world-class creep feed grinding for customers in and well beyond the medical industry."

Abrasive West didn't waste any time. The BLOHM PROFIMAT XT now on their floor was the very same machine that was at the UNITED GRINDING IMTS booth.



The BLOHM PROFIMAT XT purchased at IMTS 2022

The new facility

As Amanda put it, "the ten-cent tour of our old building was a little overpriced." In the spring of 2023, Abrasive West added six times more square footage, jumping from 4,500 sq ft to 28,000 and moving the company back to her roots in Roselle. Immediately noticeable was the jump in productivity that the PROFIMAT XT enjoyed because there was enough space for a sufficient coolant system.

"We didn't have the space at our former facility," Amanda said. "We got a much larger coolant system put in after the move, and it's been cranking out industrial parts for fuel pumps ever since."

"The new building definitely keeps our machines and our operators happy. We're working hard to fill it with new machines that expand our capabilities and new employees to build our legacy. We're ready to grow alongside new customers and markets."

Two more BLOHM machines join Abrasive West

The PROFIMAT MT and PLANOMAT HP are the most recent additions to the floor at Abrasive West, and as of Spring 2024, those machines are getting up and running. "Our first BLOHM is booked up with orders for a large customer, so we needed new machines to provide some runway, serve new customers or back things up if a machine is down for PM," Amanda said.

Forecasting the future

"I see growth for us, and a continual development of our culture," Amanda said. "We will continue to invest in machinery and quality control to ensure our operators have everything they need to take care of our customers. There are some amazing opportunities out there right now, and we're positioning ourselves to be ready for them."

All seven of the BLOHM machines will be ready too, as will the dedicated Customer Care support team at UNITED GRINDING North America. We can't wait to see all that Abrasive West accomplishes over the coming years.



Two of the seven BLOHM machines at Abrasive West

