



Stealing the Spotlight: Atlas Machine & Supply Inc.

By Heather N. Smith



Iron & Steel Technology visited Atlas Machine & Supply Inc. in Louisville, Ky., USA, for our series that spotlights the grass-roots companies powering today's steel industry while positively impacting the communities in which they operate.

When guests arrive at Atlas Machine & Supply's headquarters in Louisville, Ky., USA, the first stop isn't surrounded by metal or machines; it's a simple digital sign-in tablet at the front entrance, a quiet testament to the company's blend of tradition and modern professionalism. Soon after, a company representative personally meets visitors and leads them inside, setting the tone for a tour that feels more like entering a close-knit community than a 70,000 sq. ft. industrial facility.

As Hunter Boroff, director of steel services at Atlas, led us through the front offices, employees paused in their work to exchange greetings and warm welcomes, an easy, everyday acknowledgment that underscores Atlas Machine's long-standing culture of camaraderie and mutual respect.

That sense of their identity becomes even clearer once inside the meeting room. Covering one wall is a detailed painting showcasing Atlas Machine's evolution over more than a century: a timeline of growth, endurance and innovation that connects the company's present to its past.

Founded in 1907 in Louisville, Ky., Atlas Machine and Supply began as a manufacturer of elevators,

established by the Gimmel family, who had emigrated from Switzerland in the decades prior. The business endured early setbacks, including a 1915 fire that shifted its focus toward automotive machining and rebuilding. It navigated major economic challenges such as the Great Depression and the Louisville flood of the 1930s thanks to a conservative financial philosophy and reinvestment of profits back into the company.

By the mid-20th century, Atlas had expanded beyond elevator and engine work into air compressor service and sales, laying the groundwork for the industrial repair and support services it provides today. Over the years, it grew from a single downtown shop to a multifacility operation with locations in several states.

Atlas remains a fourth-generation, family-owned company. Leadership has evolved — until recently, the chief executive officer role was held by Richie Gimmel, a member of the founding family. Richie continues to remain actively engaged as chair of the board but has passed day-to-day operations as chief executive officer to Erick Lawson.

The timeline on the wall is more than decoration; it is a visual reminder of the company's roots, its journey through adversity and expansion, and its enduring commitment to the workforce and the industrial customers who rely on its expertise.

In a business built on repairing and rebuilding, Atlas has never forgotten how it built itself.





“Big enough to be reliable and competent, but small enough to be agile and make decisions outside of a structured box.”

Atlas is a company grounded in history, sharpened by innovation and sustained by something deeply human: an unwavering belief that skilled people can solve almost any problem.

Atlas thrives in emergency repair and industrial restoration. Customers call when something critical breaks, when replacement parts don't exist anymore or when downtime could result in lost revenue. Atlas answers with speed, precision and ingenuity.

“It takes a special kind of person to be a repairman – someone who thrives on solving problems, adapting and taking pride in work that keeps things running,” explained Harold Morgan, president of the machine shop division at Atlas.

The company has evolved to offer machining, repair and industrial service solutions. Its machining and repair business is structured into three divisions: core machining, field machining and steel services.

Core machining handles industrial repairs across all industries, with a substantial focus on steel. Field

machining is deployed when removing equipment isn't practical, allowing Atlas crews to perform precision repairs on-site and in real time. By bringing machining, welding and metrology expertise directly to operating facilities, the Breckinridge County, Ky., USA shop helps customers reduce downtime, control costs and keep critical systems running.

Steel services has become one of Atlas' most specialized areas, concentrating on galvanizing and mill-related repairs for hot, melt and cold mills. Here, rollers are restored, protective coatings are applied, and machinery that works in corrosive environments is given new strength and extended service life.

Inside the shop, massive horizontal and vertical mills shape industrial components with precision. Steel mill rollers are undercut, welded, machined, ground and finished, often with advanced protective coatings like tungsten carbide to withstand the wear of heavy production.

“We sell labor, we don't sell parts.”

Advanced welding and coating technologies sit at the center of Atlas Machine's capabilities. Submerged-arc welding handles high-volume applications with stability and consistency. Thermal spray processes — including twin-arc spray and high-velocity oxygen fuel (HVOF) — lay down coatings designed not just to patch, but to strengthen. The process of HVOF is striking: a jet

engine-like system propelling coating material at high speeds and creating a dense, durable mechanical bond.

This expertise is vital for industries like steel production, where parts such as expanding mandrels, furnace rolls and processing line rollers endure constant stress. Corrosion and wear aren't occasional; they're inevitable. Atlas maintains dedicated work production for steel mill customers, ensuring refurbishment happens fast enough to keep entire operations moving.

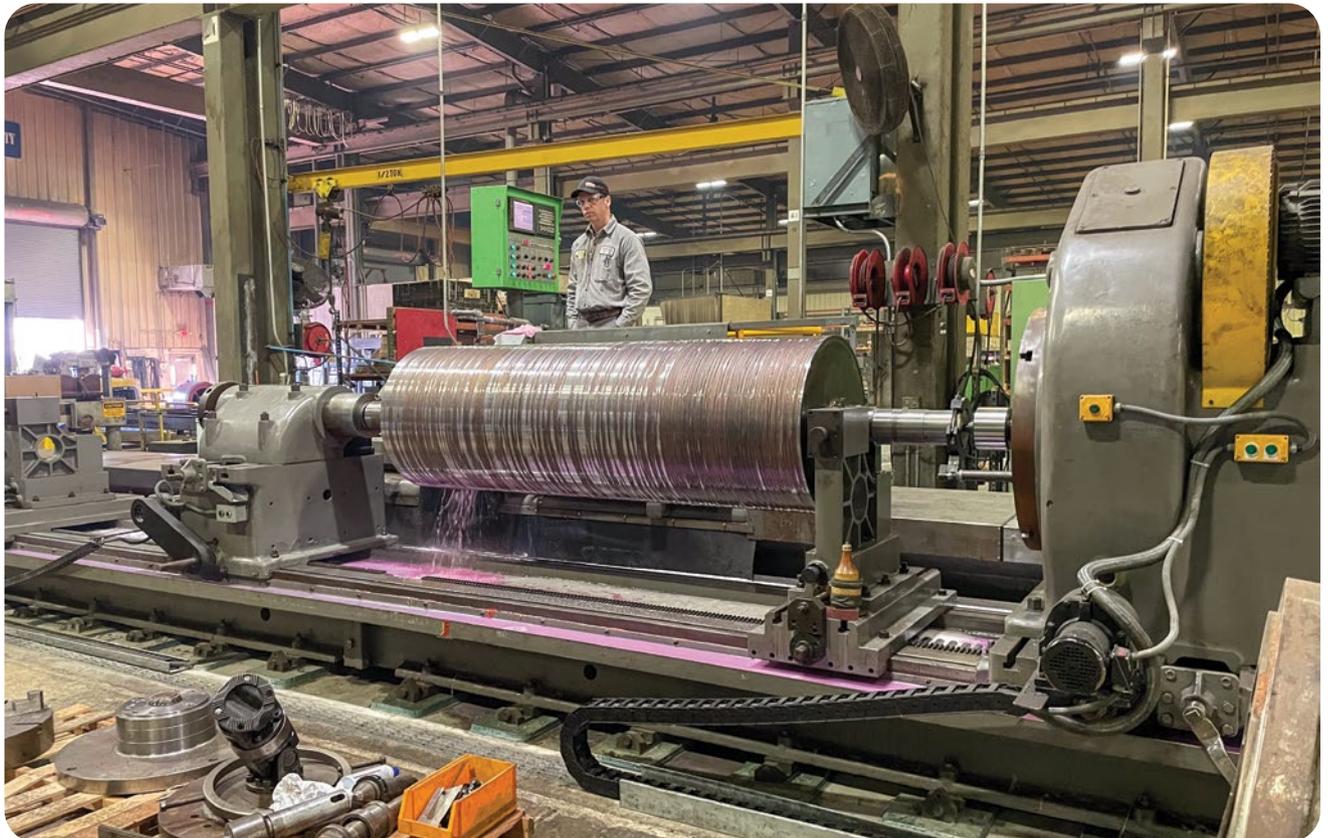
Josh Wiggs, Atlas' certified welding engineer and inspector, leads the company's advanced welding and materials work, establishing and overseeing procedures to ensure compliance with strict industry standards. His expertise extends into research and development, particularly with specialized metals and emerging technologies such as laser applications. He also plays a key role in additive and repair processes, helping Atlas secure its R-stamp certification for pressure vessel work, a demanding designation earned by few shops. As the team puts it, when a customer faces a serious problem, Josh is the one they want involved.

Over the past five years, Atlas Machine has further advanced technologically, particularly in reverse engineering. Where machinists once had to dismantle components, inspect them manually and sketch their own prints, the company now utilizes 3D scanning systems to capture precise measurements and generate new technical drawings when customers arrive with flawed or nonexistent blueprints.



“Since I've been at Atlas, we've gone from assigning a job to a machinist, who takes it from work center to work center, to having an engineer that does all that processing upfront,” said Denny Greenwell, a 27-year veteran of the company.

Atlas supports a broad range of industries, especially in high-risk, high-downtime situations. One example is



Atlas' partnership with a major equipment OEM, where they refer customers to Atlas due to grinding capabilities on one of their machines.

Atlas' innovation extends beyond workflow. The company holds several emerging patents related to the steel industry, new enough that they are still in trial phases, but emblematic of a business that refuses to remain static.

“Our quality is our people.”

Beyond its own walls, Atlas invests in local trade schools, donating tools, materials and encouragement to students who might one day carry the company forward. The philosophy is simple: hire for attitude, train for skill. If someone brings curiosity, responsibility and a service mindset, Atlas believes the rest can be taught.

Much of Atlas' strength comes not from equipment, but from its workforce. Many employees have been with the company for decades, with some commuting one to two hours each day simply because they want to be part of the organization.

Michael Kennedy is one of the many examples of internal advancement, beginning as a machinist, becoming

a lead man, later managing the machining department and now overseeing the entire machine shop. Longevity is not an exception here; it's a defining characteristic.

Atlas' commitment to workforce development is reflected not only in its training programs, but in the way it rewards those who helped build its culture. Each year, the company awards a memorial scholarship in honor of Phillip Payne, a former employee who worked with the company's field crew in Breckinridge County before his passing. The scholarship supports first- or second-year apprentices and is awarded through a blind evaluation process that includes essays and letters of recommendation from vocational instructors.

“Our product isn't rolls or parts, it's the skilled work our people do and our commitment to developing apprentices who carry that skill forward.” Harold explained.

The recipient receives US\$8,000 worth of tools, helping cover the cost which can be prohibitively expensive for young tradespeople just entering the industry. Moreover, they don't make the four-year apprentice sign anything that binds them to stay; they prefer them wanting to stay on their own.

Beyond financial support, Atlas' team continues working closely with apprentices to guide them through the early stages of their careers, reinforcing the company's dedication to nurturing the next generation of skilled workers.





“Back when I came here in ‘97, I kissed the floor.”

What truly distinguishes Atlas Machine is its culture. Step onto the shop floor and you’ll find people who have spent most of their careers at this company, sometimes alongside family members, because the workplace feels like somewhere worth staying.

Leaders at Atlas say the company’s culture is intentionally built around support, pride in craftsmanship and a shared commitment to doing the best work possible — not simply pressure to perform. Hiring is based just as much on attitude and cultural fit as on technical skill. The belief is that abilities can be taught but dedication, teamwork and a genuine desire to serve customers come from within.

That philosophy marks a clear departure from older industrial environments, where mistakes were often met with shouting, blame or fear. Veterans of the trade recall workplaces in the ‘80s and ‘90s where a single misstep could lead to public reprimand. At Atlas, the approach is deliberately different. The company rejects a culture of fear, acknowledging the complexity and seriousness of the work while ensuring employees feel supported, trusted and empowered to learn.

Atlas approaches demanding work with a long-term mindset, structuring operations to be sustainable for the people doing it. By prioritizing balance, consistency and respect for skilled labor, the company creates an environment where employees can grow, stay engaged and build lasting careers without the burnout often associated with high-intensity industrial work.

“The more you put in, the more Atlas gives back.”

In an industry that was once defined by the relentless push to keep production moving, Atlas stands out not only for what it fixes, but for how it operates. The business was started to answer the growing needs of the industry, to fill a gap that had previously existed. Today, its work restores machinery, supports critical industries and keeps manufacturing lines running. However, the company’s deeper strength is found in its people, its culture of trust and its unwavering belief in craftsmanship.

From multigeneration employees and apprentices finding their start, to engineers pushing the boundaries of innovation, to leaders who still speak in terms of responsibility rather than profit alone, Atlas reflects a version of American industry that refuses to fade. ♦

