

## Succeeding with Niche Sharpening

Two-man shop caters to a diverse customer base.

By Debora Babin Katz



In a second-story building in Needham Heights, Massachusetts, the constant hum of a new carbide saw grinder is heard in this near spotless shop called Needham Saw. Owner Doug Pellegrini invested in the new grinding machine—the UniMAX NC—for his 2,500 square-foot shop in response to his customers' increasing need for higher quality, sharper carbide saw blades.

"It's the best machine we've ever bought," said

### Shop Snapshot

**Company:**

Needham Saw

**Location:**

Needham Heights, MA

**Owner:**

Doug Pellegrini

**Year of Inception:**

1968

**Main Tool Lines:**

Amana, FS Tool, Stehle, Systi-Matic, Tenryu

**Shop Size:**

2,500 square feet

**# of Employees:**

Two

**Key Grinding Equip:**

UniMAX NC Face & Top  
Widma AS-800 Steel Reliever  
Widma Unimat-S650 Face & Top  
Schneeberger SO Tool & Cutter



**Doug Pellegrini (left) and Robert Corolla (right) prove a two-man sharpening shop can be innovative with equipment and technology.**

Pellegrini. "We are able to offer an even higher level of quality due to the new machine and to offset engineering costs."

This year, Needham Saw celebrates its 40th birthday. The company, started by Doug Pellegrini's father John Pellegrini in 1968, began in the family's small basement. A few years later, John moved the business to its current location.

In 1984, after working seven years as a custom woodworker, Doug came on board, and six years later, took over the business when his father retired. Today, Needham Saw, with only Doug and his Shop Foreman, Robert Corolla, serve a widely diverse Metropolitan business community. Their business is a 75% service and 25% tool sales mix. There are no primary lumber mills in

the area.

"Our market is more diverse and includes cutting aluminum and plastics, picture framing and custom woodworking," said Pellegrini, "it's mostly specialty work."

Addressing this market diversity is both a challenge and the key to Needham Saw's continued success. There are far more customers who are performing smaller activities, says Pellegrini, but he makes a point to include everyone of them in his geographical route.

"I tell people we are like a milk delivery company with its consistent quality on time. We're the same kind of thing just a different product," he said.

The key in an economy like Massachusetts where innovation and new technologies are a mainstay, says Pellegrini, is staying on top of new enterprises that have challenging materials which have to be cut.

"We have to find those

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**Needham Saw attracts and retains its niche customers by steel relieving 80% of the blades that go through the shop utilizing a Widma AS-800 Steel Reliever (background). Also shown is their Widma Unimat-S650 Face & Top grinder.**

people," he said. Often, 'those people' find Pellegrini, who is known in the area for his expertise and ability to work with in-house engineers to design the necessary tools to cut and manufacture their products. One such industry, Boston's medical field, has become a significant customer base for Pellegrini. These companies, for example might make prosthetics and other medical parts which require special blades for cutting plastic and aluminum materials.

Repeat customers make up 90% of Needham Saw's business, many of whom have been with the company for more than 25 years.

"You have to be reliable, dependable and you have to be able to solve problems for your customers," said Pellegrini. "If

something doesn't work, you need to correct it at no charge to them."

Pellegrini believes his significant customer retention is due to the shop's high quality standards. Unlike a majority of sharpening shops, Needham Saw steel relieves 80% of its blades utilizing a Widma AS-800 Steel Reliever he bought from Colonial Saw Company back in 1985.

"Customers appreciate the steel relieving as it increases blade life and it helps maintain the proper gullet configuration," said Rob Corolla.

In addition to investing in sharpening equipment, Needham Saw keeps current with their computer equipment and software in order to run the business more efficiently. They make a



The new UniMAX NC's programming allows Robert Corolla to work on other sharpening services and sell tools to customers while it goes to work sharpening a variety of saw blades.

Robert Corolla (front) points out the features of the machine to Dave Rakauskas, V.P. of Colonial Saw.



Needham Saw is running oil coolant on the UniMAX. This optional coolant filtration system, offered by Colonial Saw, eliminates the need to clean the coolant tank and change out the oil.

point to market this fact to customers.

"We definitely have a fussy group of customers who want their tools done perfectly, so we let them know that we are constantly updating," said Pellegrini. His customer invoices currently announce the new arrival of their uniMAX NC at the bottom.

Today, Needham Saw's biggest challenge, like so many grinding shops, is the current economy. Yet, Pellegrini has been around long enough to know the economy is cyclical and wise enough to buy during the downturn using Colonial Saw's

financing. This assures his shop is tooled up, and they are trained and comfortable with the new machinery so they are prepared when the economy bounces back.

"You need to be flexible and able to respond to the market," said Rob Corolla, who finds that increases in sharpening demand are unpredictable in any given week or month. The answer to this, says Pellegrini, "is to be more efficient by investing in equipment."

In October of 2007, Pellegrini decided it was time to retire the shop's OPTi-mat and invest in a new,

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# Sharpening Shop Spotlight continued...

fully-automated UniMax NC. He contacted Dave Rakauskas at Colonial Saw Company, who he had purchased his previous machinery from to discuss the plan. At the time, Pellegrini thought it was unlikely he could buy the machine and have it installed in his shop in time to take advantage of the tax benefit the purchase would generate. "Not so," said Rakauskas, who quickly processed the sale and arranged to have his service engineer Rudy Stalder available for the installation.

On the last day of December, during a snow storm, Rudy arrived early in the morning to assist Needham Saw with the installation. It would not be a typical installation for Rudy. The challenge: Needham Saw is located in the second story of a an industrial building. They would need to remove a part of a wall and large window on the second floor in order for a beam folk lift to take out the OPTimat and deliver

**Out with the OPTimat**



the new UniMAX.

Rudy helped with the delivery coordination, standing outside for hours in the snow, to make sure the two machines were swapped

On last day of December 2007, Rudy Stalder of Colonial Saw (above and left) assists with the delivery and installation of a new UniMAX NC and the removal of an OPTimat through a second story window in time for Needham Saw to receive their tax deduction for the year.

**In with the UniMAX NC**



out safely. In the late afternoon, Rudy set to work installing the UniMAX and training Corolla and Pellegrini on the new machine.

"Rudy was the first one here that morning. He spent the whole day with the box truck, and helped us get the wall apart, move a duct in the wall, and open the side of the building so we could take delivery of the UniMAX," said Pellegrini. The shop owner says he's not surprised, however, by Colonial Saw's willingness to go beyond the call of duty when it comes to their machines.

terward when it comes to service," he said. "It's the after-sale service and instant technical expertise that is why I'm more than happy to buy from Colonial Saw."



**Colonial Saw Service engineer Rudy Stalder install Needham Saw's new UniMAX NC which was delivered through a second story window with a beam fork lift.**

"I've bought things from other companies and been left out to dry af-



**For more info:  
1-888-262-6355  
www.csaw.com  
info@csaw.com**