



JIM COURTNEY/BUSINESS FIRST

General Manager James Kelly, right, says the family atmosphere at West Metal Works has contributed to a very low employee turnover rate. In the background, Vu Tran grinds a seam before welding.

# West Metal builds for success

BY JANE SCHMITT

Started in 1946 as a welding shop to serve Buffalo grain mills, West Metal Works Inc. has developed into an international player in custom metal fabricating.

The corporate motto is "Excellence the first time," and this company delivers with products that meet stringent customer demands and global industry standards. A long list of clients includes the U.S. government, the nuclear industry and chemical, food and pharmaceutical sectors.

West Metal Works is "the proven choice," according to company officials.

"Very few jobs are returned to us," Patricia Mertz says. "They go out and they're perfect when they leave. They have to be."

West Metal Works, which also manufactures pressure vessels, specializes in complex, highly engineered fabrication jobs primarily for the federal departments of defense and energy, according to the Web site. It also handles contracts for private companies. Annual sales are in the \$6 million range, Mertz says.

"The workmanship is highly skilled," she says. "It is very specialized."

She and her husband, Wayne, bought the company 10 years ago. It's a certified WBO (woman-owned business) and SDB (small



## West Metal Works Inc.

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Patricia Mertz, CEO

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disadvantaged business).

Together they run a group of affiliated manufacturing and service companies including Metal Locking Service, a division of West Metal Works that does emergency

cast-iron repairs; Goergen-Mackwirth Co. Inc. of Buffalo, which offers custom metal fabrication and industrial contracting; and the Silver Creek-based S. Howes Inc., which designs and makes processing equipment.

"When we bought West Metal Works in 1996, there were two people in the shop and three people in the office," Mertz says.

Current employment is 32, including the couple's two sons and their son-in-law.

Mertz attributes much of the growth to General Manager James Kelly, who has been instrumental in pursuing and securing large government contracts.

"Our niche gives us the ability to focus in on certain government contracts," she says.

West Metal Works has won six consecutive Supplier of the Year awards from West Valley Nuclear Services. It recently was accepted as an approved vendor by Bechtel, a global engineering, construction and project management firm.

"I feel our biggest strength is that we're a family owned business," Kelly says. "I have been an employee here for almost 20 years. We just have no turnover in staff. The continuity in employees is such that you can count on everybody being there. Wayne and Pat have done a great job of creating a family atmosphere here."