



// by Kip Hanson, senior editor //

HOMEFIELD ADVANTAGE

Made in America is more than a sticker on the side of a product; it's a crucial part of our country's heritage and its future

It's Memorial Day. The grandkids just left, and my wife is griping at me about working through yet another holiday. Still, I stop and kiss her cheek as I walk to the kitchen for another cup of coffee. Such is life when you're approaching four decades of marital bliss.

The TV is on, and Mike Pence is placing a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. Ours is a great country, I think, not only for the respect we give to those who've defended it with their lives but for our unrelenting patriotism and ability to set aside partisanship for the greater good – albeit far too infrequently.

Political differences notwithstanding, the vice president paid humble tribute to our fallen that day in May, as did I and my colleagues at TechGen Media Group. Godspeed, good soldiers.

Serving or self-serving?

So what does Memorial Day have to do with U.S. manufacturing?

Plenty. Sheet metal workers, welders and steelworkers, machinists and assemblers – I've worked alongside hundreds of them and spoken to thousands more during my many years in manufacturing, and I can tell you they are among the most patriotic of all Americans, as are the owners and managers of the companies for which they work.

The cynical among us might call this self-serving. Of course, Made in America has a special meaning for the manufacturing industry and its millions of workers. They wouldn't have jobs without it.

Maybe so, but I like to think it goes much deeper. Making and buying U.S. goods is the ultimate form of patriotism. It supports local communities and keeps the economy on a firm footing, assuring a future for our children and the children yet to come. That, and it just plain feels good.

Made in America is more than a slogan – it's a way of life – and we as Americans must continue to respect



↑ In full production: McCain Mfg. employees prepare more than 1.5 miles of modular McCain Walls for Denver International Airport's "Great Hall" project.

this most basic tenet of our existence while applauding those who make it possible: the American worker.

Everything shop

One of these Americans is Francesco Digrado, president and creative director of Acme Made In America

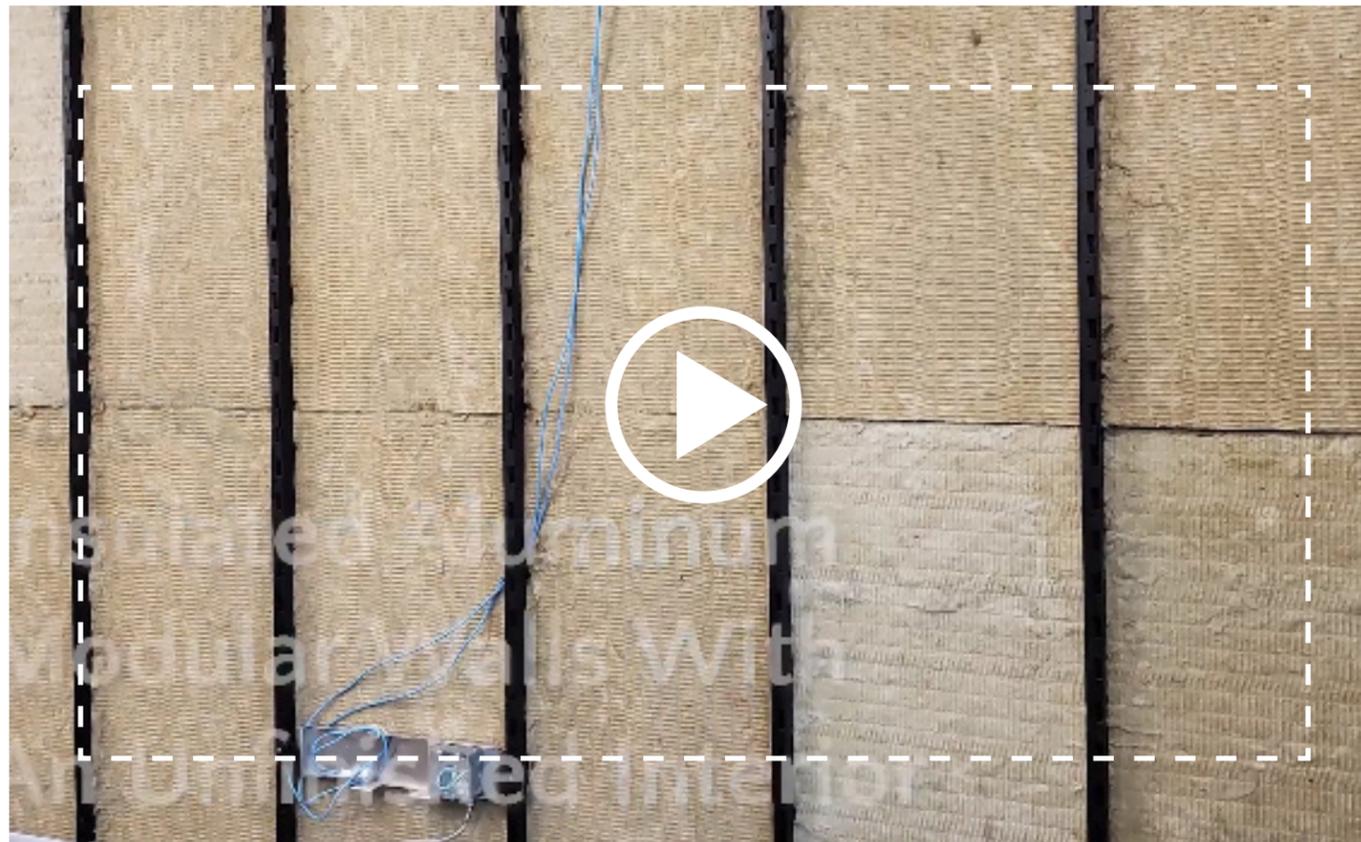
Inc. Over the past 20 years, he and his team have manufactured an eclectic array of products in their 75,000-sq.-ft., 40-employee facility in Commerce, Calif. Examples of their work include a 12-ft.-tall gumball machine, a Bud Light ball pit, an upside-down church and a pair of captain's chairs for the >

Starship Orville – work that Digrado says necessitates fine detail and a broad knowledge of all things manufacturing.

“We’re what I like to call extreme builders,” he says. “This means custom fabrication, everything outside the box, all specialty products. We’re not into mass production, but rather one-offs and big experiences – we’re an anything and everything shop.”

As many manufacturers know, however, finding people able to build “some really cool stuff” is becoming quite difficult. Like many U.S. manufacturers, Digrado has tried sending work to Mexico and Canada, but between the import duties, long lead times and quality problems, he says he far prefers keeping the work in-house.

“The U.S. manufacturing industry is losing its skilled tradespeople,” he says.



↑ Watch the video to learn more about McCain Mfg.'s modular walls systems.

“What it breaks down to is the health of individual communities. Knowing that we can support American workers in four different states is incredibly gratifying.”

Joe Amico, vice president, EVS Metal Inc.

“This isn’t such a problem when you’re making 50,000 of something, where you can use a robot or hire a button pusher, but we require a different skill set. We need people that can do 3-D printing, cabinetry, metal fabrication and apply automotive, quality finishes. Those people are tough to find.” >

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We have only ourselves to blame. Elected officials have been allowed to enact short-sighted trade policies while parents and teachers have been led to believe that the only good jobs are the ones made possible with a college degree. Perhaps most importantly, much of the manufacturing industry itself has allowed profits to come before patriotism.

Alternative solutions

"I believe too many companies have taken the easy route by sending their products overseas and have sold our

labor force short as a result," says Jeffrey L. McCain, founder and CEO of McCain Mfg. Inc., a precision sheet metal fabricator in Vista, Calif. "More companies should take the initiative and responsibility to figure out how they can be successful at manufacturing goods here in the United States."

McCain should know. He's been producing custom metal parts and assemblies for more than 30 years, first as an OEM of traffic equipment >

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*Jeffrey L. McCain, founder and
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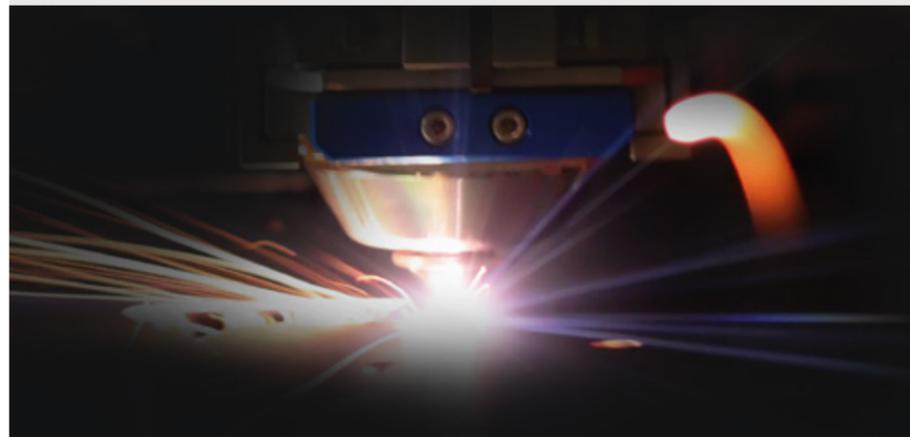
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supplies that he successfully sold in 2016, then as a contract manufacturer servicing a variety of Fortune 500 customers and more recently as an OEM of environmentally friendly McCain Walls modular wall systems and accessory dwelling units.

“Creating sustainable, reusable products as well as disrupting traditional construction by offering alternative solutions manufactured in the United States is a goal that I strongly believe in,” he says.

The company’s 100,000-sq. ft. LEED-certified facility houses an assortment of state-of-the-art, world-class systems from Amada America and

other suppliers, all of which help McCain stay competitive in the face of overseas competition.

“The biggest and perhaps only advantage of overseas manufacturing is cheap labor,” he says. “And although our equipment and plant are largely automated, we also have a talented and skilled workforce that is highly trained. With such a dynamic combination, we can offer quick turnaround times, something that the industries we sell to require.”

That doesn’t imply that McCain has not faced domestic challenges. The current trade war and its



↑ This multi-story structure for the Mountain Dew Kickstart event is an example of the diverse products designed and built by Acme Made in America.

resultant tariffs have adversely affected him and so many other manufacturers, requiring them to pass any cost deltas on to their customers. Fortunately for McCain, he has not suffered a loss of business by doing so.

“Government regulations are another obstacle,” he says. “Many of them are justified, but some

regulations are overreaching and make it more difficult and expensive to do business in the United States, especially as labor costs continue to rise. Therefore, companies must continue to offset these roadblocks through smarter engineering and leveraging manufacturing practices that take advantage of equipment advancements.” >

Only benefits

Joe Amico, vice president of EVS Metal Inc., with locations in New Jersey, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania and Texas, offers several good reasons for keeping manufacturing stateside.

“For starters, we’re able to react much more quickly to market trends,” he says. “A three-hour time difference doesn’t create nearly the lag as a 12-hour one does, and there are no language barriers to overcome, making communications with U.S. suppliers faster and easier.

“Plus, with locations in four states, even a customer in California can be at one of our facilities within a few hours if the need arises,” he adds.

“This makes the turnaround of a new

product or change to a prototype design a much faster process than is possible with an overseas fabricator.”

Additionally, managing a U.S.-based supply chain means there are fewer potential crises to manage, notes Amico, such as those of the geopolitical variety, or major disasters such as tsunamis.

“And even if a disaster does occur, the magnitude is generally much lower when we can be involved locally, with boots on the ground to make changes or alter plans as necessary to ensure customers get what they need,” he says. “That type of control is rarely possible with overseas suppliers.”

Like McCain Mfg., EVS Metal relies on a large percentage of automated



↑ EVS Metal prides itself on keeping its employees in the loop on company activities and up to speed on the latest technologies.

equipment to stay competitive, much of it also from Amada, although Amico is quick to point out that EVS employees receive regular training and are “kept in the loop” on the company’s activities. EVS Metal offers a full range of sheet metal fabrication services as well as machining, welding, finishing, and assembly and integration.

The New Jersey facility is also authorized to design and build UL-certified electronic enclosures. Altogether, EVS Metal boasts 250,000 sq. ft. of manufacturing space and hundreds of employees – there’s little that Amico and his team won’t tackle, and they have plenty of U.S. pride in what they do. >

“The U.S. manufacturing industry is losing its skilled tradespeople.”

*Francesco Digrado, president and creative director,
Acme Made In America Inc.*



↑ High-tech, automated equipment like that shown here from Amada is an important piece of staying competitive against foreign producers.

Why it matters

Amico is one of the founders of EVS Metal. That was in 1994, although his experience in the manufacturing industry began long before that. Amico says there was a long stretch where everything was made here in the United States, and then the offshoring trend began. The manufacturing industry took a beating financially and – in some ways – emotionally. American-made products lost much of their “shine,” he explains, noting the

auto industry in the 1980s and 1990s as an excellent example.

“But now,” he says, “people realize just how important it is to support the American economy whenever possible.”

There’s satisfaction in doing this, Amico believes, that has been missing for far too long. Made in America is now something people desire, and U.S. products are considered superior



↑ Acme Made in America’s corporate motto “We Can Build Anything” goes hand in hand with American manufacturing ideals.

to those made overseas, rather than something to shy away from.

This may have something to do with the ‘maker movement’ and ‘shop local’ mentalities that have sprung up in the last decade or so, but whatever the reason, people want to know where their products are made. They want

to know that manufacturers aren’t taking advantage of cheap labor or forcing people to work in untenable conditions overseas.

Made in America is important to Amico in other ways as well.

“When companies come to us with fabrication projects, they’re helping to create sustainable employment in local communities,” he says. “While there is a lot of attention paid to the U.S. economy overall – which is, of course, important – what it breaks down to is the health of individual communities. Knowing that we can support American workers in four different states is incredibly gratifying.” ■

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