



# We Never Feel Alone.

*Wells Technology shares  
how they began and who helped.*

Unofficially in 1985, Wells Technologies began with founder and president Andy Wells consulting for Control Data Corporation in Minneapolis – a job he got after working for a year free to prove to them he could be an asset to the engineering department. After being hired as a consultant, Andy was transferred to the Aerospace division where he built prototypes and designed processes using robotics which were new to the times.

Andy started with a \$1,300 used Bridgeport machine tool he purchased from Harvey Machine Tool and a South Bend ten-inch turning lathe from a local high school. "It was an abused machine but it was mine and it gave me the tools I needed to start," said Andy. "My dad helped me but said that he doubted I would ever get my money back." But Andy had attended the IMTS show in Chicago and he was excited at the opportunities to make fast prototypes for companies he wanted to work with.

Andy left Control Data in 1989 but in true "Andy" style he was already looking for the next problem to solve. So on his way home from Control Data he stopped in at Golden Plump in Cold Spring, MN for a tour. He had been a farmer and he knew chickens, maybe opportunity lay among the feathers. Andy shares that his first thought was how processing a chicken was the complete opposite on manufacturing parts. "We make parts and put them together to sell. In processing they take the chicken apart to sell."

The philosophy was different but the need for quality and problem solving remains. For Golden Plump, it was handling the chickens early in the process that was messy, tiring and expensive. Getting chickens off the truck was no fun at all. It was during the tour that Andy noticed this and asked Golden Plump if he could take a stab at fixing this problem for them. Turns out that Golden Plump had considered automation but could not find a company willing to take on the project. Obviously they had never met Andy. He left there that day with chicken crates to use in developing and testing processes that had already started to come to his head.

Early automation required nearly total uniformity, and chickens are not uniformed. But Andy, being naive and self-confident, said he was sure he



*Productivity Representative, Todd Hanson  
enjoys working with Andy Wells on  
innovative ways to support his success.*



*Andy Wells is congratulated by President Barack Obama on behalf of the Small Business Administration as Minnesota Small Business Person of the Year.*

## Brilliance, a Bridgeport and a lathe.

could provide a solution. This was not ego – this was being sure that an answer existed and having the tenacity to find it. After a few weeks of development, the first prototype was ready to be viewed by management. It worked well but there was huge glitch. Golden Plump had given Andy all new crates to test the product. The reality was that thousands of their crates were used and many were damaged. Andy made modifications and a few days later Golden Plump ordered the system to be installed.

Golden Plump gave Andy two days to install the new system which he did thanks to help from his son and local college kids. Once the installation was complete, Andy spent the next four to five days babysitting the process and working the bugs out of the system. It was during this time that Andy came across the problem that truly launched Wells Technology. In processing the chickens, employees would use hand operated scissors which Andy learned caused a large number of carpal tunnel issues. Again Andy had an idea and asked Golden Plump employees if they would be willing to try a new tool if he brought one in that would help. They agreed and the first air driven shears were designed and manufactured. Today they are the standard for processing chickens around the world. In fact the scissors helped Andy's team to see that they were great at making small screws and other small parts. Small parts were also best for Wells because of their location in Bemidji. They could put a lot of value in a small box. This opened a huge door in understanding what they could offer the industry over and above their new OEM product.



Productivity Inc

Andy needed a supplier that could help them to choose equipment for making small parts. Jack Chermack was Andy's first contact with Productivity and was a tremendous visionary. He helped Wells move into more and more aerospace manufacturing and other complex industries.

"Our people love making the small parts", said Andy. "Taking the time to develop processes that improved quality came to life in a huge way." Innovative ideas began pouring out daily from the shop floor and each were given equal time for determining value.

Getting into CNC advanced Wells Technologies' relationship with Productivity even further. Productivity spent significant time listening to their problems and introducing solutions cementing the relationship. "In my mind, it is what separates Productivity for us," says Andy.

Andy has a great mind for thinking outside the box. However Andy states that his success is only possible with the support of great vendors who know the industry and their products. Andy has always been open to learning from those in the industry that can help, "We never feel completely lost because we know we are not alone." Another company that has really helped Andy succeed was Fastenal. They helped them rethink processes from marketing to strategic planning.

Andy believes that a sense of trust is the absolute key to success. Trust between customers, employees, vendors and peers must be protected at all cost. Even much more than cost. When unforeseen issues arise, honest and immediate communication is needed to facilitate continued trust. Followed by trust is attention to detail. No matter if someone will see it or not, there must be attention to detail at all times. This diligence improves both safety and quality.

Anyone that knows Andy Wells knows he has a heart for training the youth in his area. Andy was saddened that he had to turn away job applicants because of training issues. These applicants would walk back to their car disappointed and many times Andy could even see kids in the car. So he started a training school to give hope to these applicants. Andy looks beyond past mistakes and offers opportunity for those willing to walk the straight and narrow. Says Andy, "We don't have to shut the door on them anymore. We created a non-profit training school that has received grants and has a 93 percent success rate. We graduate six to seven apprentices a year. Advanced machining and design training is new with the first graduate expected this year." His company has sponsored career day tours for students, parents, teachers, grandparents, community and more. "Whether they get in the industry or not, a new appreciation for manufacturing always follows," says Andy.

Recently Wells Technologies won the small business award presented by the SBA. While in Washington DC he shared with everyone that success is about affecting the lives of others. Yes money plays a role but it is not the goal. "It is by giving that you get," says a very humble Andy Wells. "Imagine if we each gave back even a fraction of what has been given to us. What if we measured success by how many lives we have impacted and not how much profit we have made. Imagine a world like that." But don't stop with imagining. Andy's advice is to "Get out there. Get involved.

