



***You'd like a  
20-ton beam  
bent into a  
semicircle?  
Sure. You want fries with that?***

### **A Vision: To Be World-class in Every Way**

"We have a vision," says George F. Wendt, the company's president. "We are striving to become a world-class leader in our chosen business in four categories: quality, speed, service, and value. I think we're approaching world-class status in at least two of those categories right now. We know this because we benchmark ourselves against the best in the world regularly."

In addition to roll bending almost any metal shape—down to 1- by 1- by 1/8-inch-thick angles rolled into 4-inch-diameter circles—the company also:

1. Bends and rolls all types of pipe and tubing up to 20 inches in diameter.
2. Rolls sheet and plate up to 3/8 inch thick into pipes and cylinders up to 12 feet long.
3. Provides processing services, including sawing, shearing, punching, and welding.
4. Sells a variety of stocked items, including angle rings, lock-seamed pipe, elbows, and cast slide gates.

Two-day turnarounds are common, even on big jobs, Wendt reports. "That's what the customers want today," he adds.

Wendt describes a recent project that he claims is representative: A 104-foot-long beam, 33 inches tall and weighing 318 pounds per foot, was shipped to Chicago by rail from Arkansas (three 80-foot rail cars were required). The 16-ton beam was trucked to Chicago Metal Rolled Products, bent into the requested shape in days, and sent to its ultimate destination, the Fresno-Yosemite International Airport in California.

The vast majority of the company's products are used in four markets: construction; original equipment manufacturers, such as farm equipment and truck manufacturers; mechanical contractors, which use the shapes for flanges to connect ducts; and metal service centers, which subcontract fabrication for their customers. The company also is certified to do work for

"So, Charlie, I've got this piece of steel I need bent. Where should I go to get it done? ... No, it's big. ... I mean, really big. ... Charlie, think of the booster for the space shuttle. I need rail cars—plural—to ship this thing. ... I can get it done locally? That's great. ... I can WAIT while they bend it??? Sure, Charlie, next you'll be telling me they have a drive-through lane and I can get fries with that."

**By Tony Carroll,  
Contributing Writer**

**H**ow far can a vision take you?

It can make you world-class if you follow the vision consistently, says one Chicago-based company.

Chicago Metal Rolled Products Co., with fewer than 100 employees, thinks it may have the biggest capacity for rolling structural steel in the world. The firm's giant beam

rollers (see **photo above**) can put curves into wide-flange beams up to 44 inches tall that weigh 285 pounds per foot and do it "the hard way"—along the longest axis of the cross section. Its latest equipment acquisition is the largest beam roller ever built for anyone.

The company also offers its customers a choice of three-day, two-day, one-day, or same-day service on these huge structurals. It backs that up with a 98 percent on-time shipping record.

nuclear plants. Customers are located throughout the U.S. and Canada.

Business has been brisk and remains so, Wendt indicates. "The year 2000 was very good for us, better than 1999. And so far 2001 looks even better."

### Family-owned for Most of Its History

This fabricator can trace its roots back to 1908, when it was formed as a contract manufacturer named Chicago Metal Manufacturing Co. In 1923, Wendt's grandfather, George F. Hauf, bought the firm and steadily grew it over the next several decades. Hauf's descendants split the company into two entities in 1984: Chicago Metal Rolled Products and Chicago Metal Fabricators, specializing in punching, press braking, welding, and assembly.

Chicago Metal Rolled Products built its capabilities. In 1992, it took delivery on a Roundo R-11 structural rolling machine that was, at that time, the largest in the Western Hemisphere. In 1994, it purchased Wallace Tube Bending, which added pipe bending capability and established a second location in Bryson City, North Carolina.

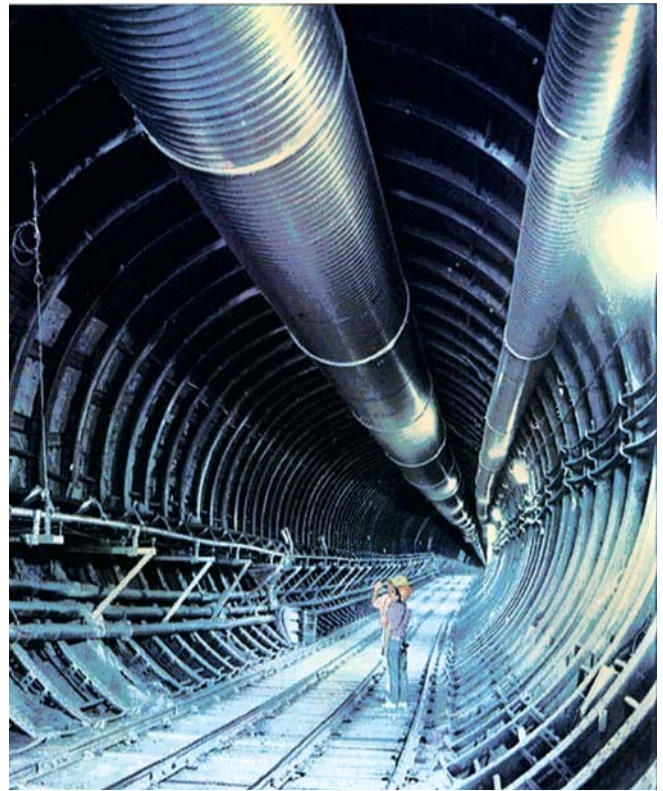
Another large bending machine bought in 1996 gave the company the ability to respond rapidly to customer requests. By 1999, the company had purchased the Roundo B-15000 and also added 40,000 square feet to its Chicago facility.

Today, the company has 130,000 square feet of manufacturing capacity, 85 employees, and two shifts. Key company personnel besides Wendt are his brother Joseph, a vice president; his son Dan, an engineer; his mother, Mrs. W. H. Wendt Jr., a director who still is active in the firm; Controller Raymond Reitz; and Plant Manager Rafael Cartagena.

The company has 50 beam rollers. As it adds new equipment, the older machines are upgraded, modified, and dedicated to specific jobs. This policy improves efficiency and reduces setup times, Wendt says. He adds that another important advantage for the company is its capability to lift up to 40 tons at a time.

### Meeting Challenges and Solving Problems

One of the biggest and most difficult challenges the company faces is securing good workers in a tight labor market.



Chicago Metal Rolled Products built the tunnel supports at the Yucca Mountain Project in Nevada, a possible site for burying nuclear waste.

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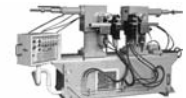
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***“The challenge has not been that of replacing qualified workers who leave, so much as it has been finding new workers as we’ve grown.”***

“The challenge has not been that of replacing qualified workers who leave, so much as it has been finding new workers as we’ve grown,” Wendt explains. “I’ve worked with community groups, schools, and training organizations to keep the pipeline

flowing. We also do a lot of in-house training—basic math, computer applications, shop order documentation, problem solving, machinery operation,

and, of course, quality and safety.”

The company’s work force also uses a unique team concept. Each team comprises representatives from

production, sales, shipping and receiving, and maintenance, who work together to drive cost improvements.

Customer demand for faster turn-arounds has been a major and increasing trend, Wendt says. This, in turn, has made coordinating inbound and outbound shipments a full-time job. The company has recognized the trend and committed itself to meeting the needs of its customers.

Metal supply and quality are not problems. Wendt says the Chicago area has many companies that sell high-quality steel at competitive prices and notes that this represents yet another competitive advantage for his firm.

### **The Vision at Work**

This family-owned firm, without the image of a giant international conglomerate, has carved out a niche in its field.

“We are driven by our agenda of becoming a world-class manufacturer of curved steel,” Wendt asserts. “We also are driven to continual improvement in the company. We know we can’t be complacent at all. Something always needs to be improved, and we all know that the last 10 percent of improvement is the hardest.” ■

*Tony Carroll is President of Southshire Enterprises and a free-lance writer based in Blue Bell, Pennsylvania, e-mail southshire@aol.com.*

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### **Additional Sources:**



*Pipe and Tube Bending Manual (2nd edition)*  
**By John Gillanders**

*Pocket Guide to Flanges, Fittings, and Piping Data*  
**By R.R. Lee**



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