



New owners focus on high-tech automation at Guild International

This has been a truly landmark year for Guild International, a privately-held company specialized in coil joining equipment for the steel processing, tube producing, and stamping industries. Firstly, 2018 marks the company's 60th Jubilee. Secondly, in February the company was purchased by three long-term employees. Company President Joseph "Joe" Thomas (formally VP of Operations), Chief Financial Officer William "Bill" Maruschak and Vice President of Sales Mark Wagner (formerly Sales Engineer) are the proud new owners. These gentlemen met with Stainless Steel World to talk about this exciting change and how they are passionate about growing the well-respected Guild brand through technical automation and a commitment to quality.

By Joanne McIntyre

"As a longtime employee, I've always known that Guild International was a solid, stable company that built great machines," said Mr. Thomas. "When the opportunity was presented to purchase the company, with Bill and Mark as my partners, I knew this would be the chance of a lifetime. Now we have the opportunity to take Guild into the future, building on a solid reputation of 60 years serving many industries."

The new team purchased Guild International from Michael Wheeler, the son of the original founder, who has continued with the company as Chairman of the Board. The new owners have a great understanding of the company's philosophy and products; Mr. Thomas and Mr. Maruschak have each been with the company for over 30 years, while Mr. Wagner joined the company in 2009.

"Guild International is a trusted company that is performing strongly in the market," explains Mr. Thomas. "Our initial challenge has been to take a company that is already running successfully yet still find a way to improve it. Initial plans include bringing Guild into the digital age with greater technical automation. We believe that continuing to improve our technological capabilities is



The weld created by the QMT Series Seam Welder by Guild International is an overlap resistance weld. The two coil ends are slightly overlapped and the weld wheels, one on the top and one on the bottom, roll across the overlapped ends to make the weld. Then hardened planish rolls, again one on the top and one on the bottom, follow the weld wheels, and the result is a very fast, flat, and strong weld. Welds created using this machine are usually nearly as strong as the parent material. Any weldable material can be joined on these machines.

vital to match the expectations of our customers.”

Mr. Maruschak added: “Customers around the world appreciate Guilds’ long history and trusted name. We’re keen to let people know that we won’t drastically alter the business. We will work on improving the range that we have on offer while evaluating how new products can be developed to meet their future needs.”

“We’ll diversify based on the evolving needs of our customers,” continues Mr. Wagner. “While the coil joining business is an old industry, it is also an ever-changing one. There are ongoing changes to standards, the degree of automation, safety issues, operational efficiency, etc. Essentially our intention is to continually fine-tune the company.”

Investing in technology

The new owners have an ongoing investment plan that is modernizing the company’s technological

automation as well as recruiting skilled staff. “Recent investments have added multiple features to our production lines,” explains Mr. Thomas. “Whereas in the past some systems were either offline or located elsewhere, such as separate induction or annealing stations, these have now been integrated into the machines. Today our fully integrated machines are basically a one-stop process carrying out welding, annealing, shearing, milling etc; every step can be completed in just one sequence.” Mr. Wagner adds: “New diagnostic systems enable operators to recognize any issues as they arise. The fully digitalized systems display an array of information on-screen in real time, achieving a far greater degree of efficiency. From an operations standpoint, it’s more operator-friendly and streamlined. In the past up to five people may have been required to run and maintain a machine; now the operator interfaces directly with all aspects of the process and has up-to-date status points.”

Investments in personnel

As the level of technical automation within the company has increased, the team have invested in personnel able to meet the demands for greater technical know-how.

“As owners we have a deep understanding of the company,” explains Mr. Marushak. “I myself have over 25 years of field knowledge which I can now implement. We have the capability to look at our production from multiple focal points. This multifaceted approach gives us a well-rounded perspective of our equipment in the day to day process.”

Mr. Thomas: “As the technology increases we are bringing on board staff that have a technical background. Guild engineers can work on the engineering design of a machine and follow it all the way into production. They understand from start to finish how the whole process works. In a niche industry such as ours, this is a real asset which strengthens the whole company. It’s essential to have engineers that are multi-faceted and understand the diagnostics of the increasingly complex system.”

Strong presence in China

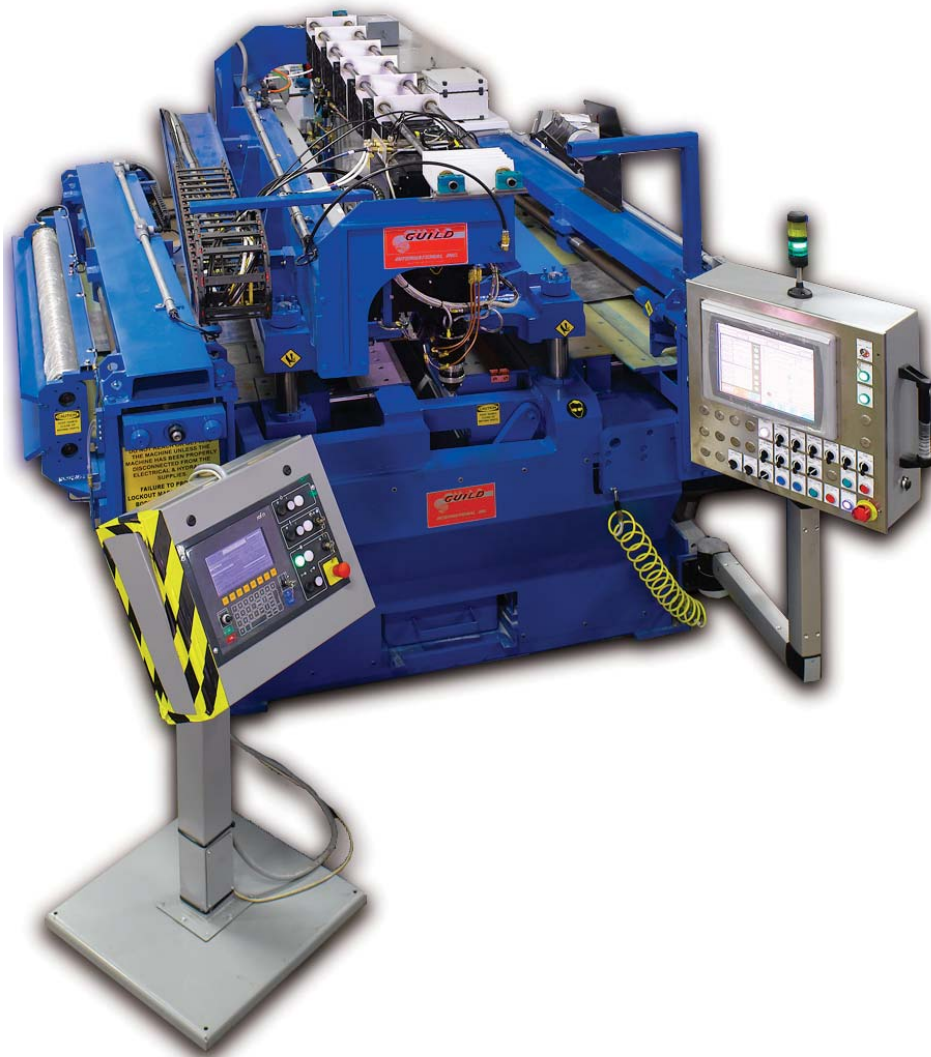
Guild International enjoys great success in the Chinese market and

unlike many US companies, has maintained its customer base there despite the economic turn-down in recent years. Mr. Thomas: “The Chinese market is improving and an interesting development is that our machines are now in demand for more specialized metals. China is producing a lot more stainless steel grades and also more exotic stainless steels. Producers are setting their sights on more complex materials such as the 400 family of stainless steel which is rather difficult to weld and handle. For example grade 444 is used for automotive panelling to achieve higher strength and corrosion resistance. Our coil joining machines have no difficulty working with these exotic materials or indeed any material that needs to be joined.”

“In the past year we received an order from a stainless steel factory in Pujiang, China for six coil joining machines,” explains Mr. Thomas. “Local competition in China is fierce and the local price is hard to beat. However, it is also a very brand sensitive country which works in our favor: if a manufacturer sees their competitor using successfully equipment they will often choose to use the same brand. The recent order for six machines was placed by a company which made us their preferred supplier many years ago.” “Chinese customers are very brand-loyal,” agrees Mr. Wagner, to the point where they are happy to pay more than a locally manufactured machine because they are confident that our technology will deliver the performance they demand. Customer confidence is important; we know that any inconsistency in the operation of your coil joining equipment will create a production bottleneck. It may seem like a small piece of equipment in the scope of the whole line but it is a crucial part.

Evolving products

Versatility is one of Guild Internationals’ greatest strengths; flexibility is key and being able to meet any customer demands is their secret to success. This is also reflected in the range of coil joining equipment it produces utilizing every welding technique available—MIG, TIG, resistance, and laser. Indeed the development of resistance welders has proven hugely popular and over the



The MEL Laser Welder is designed and engineered to be the most technically advanced laser welder on the market. The fully automatic welding machine requires very little operator involvement.

past two decades, the company has risen to become the world's leading provider of resistance coil joiners.

Laser welding is a relatively new area for the company, with the first Guild laser welder delivered three years ago. "That was a learning process," smiles Mr. Thomas. "The machine is working very well in the field, our customer loves it. It was a big advancement which we will continue to move ahead with."

"In terms of products, we've surpassed our competitors in two key ways," explains Mr. Thomas. "Firstly we don't just offer 'standard' machines; we are always able to meet the desires of our customers and are open to making changes to provide customized equipment. Secondly, we are more dynamic, always willing to improve on existing designs to push ahead the evolution of the technology."

Refurbishment niche

Mr. Wagner was keen to add that refurbishment of older machines is another key area that makes Guild unique. "Upgrades and refurbishments are a service that we are happy to provide for our customers. There is a lot of demand for this service yet many of our competitors are not willing to do this or even to maintain their old equipment. In contrast, we devote a lot of manpower to this service to help our customers keep their machines running."

"In the future, we may well dedicate a whole department to refurbishments if demand continues to rise," concurs Mr. Maruschak. "There are many ageing machine lines that are 20 to 30 years old and require upgrades, ranging from mechanical and controls upgrades to overhaul maintenance. Operators are looking for new technology to create more efficiency. Not every operator has the means to purchase a new machine, however, we can help them to modernize their existing machines. Our philosophy is to listen to our customers' needs and help them maintain and upgrade their existing equipment to achieve cost savings."

Quality assurance and testing

Another key area that the new owners have focused on has been quality assurance. Every machine produced is thoroughly checked, with various levels of quality assurance and testing carried out both during fabrication and after each machine is assembled.



The NB Overlap Resistance Welder produces a fast, high strength weld and is available with shear and transfer clamps so that the overlap can be kept to a minimum.

Mr. Wagner explains: “In terms of QA/QC requirements, Guild is accredited with the CCC Mark (China) and the CE Mark (Europe) and CSA (Canada). Our production line has a 300-point checklist in place covering everything from the mechanical side to the electrical side to fluid control. Our customers demand high quality and know we can deliver, wherever they may be in the world. For example, if we are shipping a machine to Europe we go through an audit that includes an inspection process that is incredibly detailed, right down to the thickness of the paint applied! That means that if there is ever a question we can immediately pull up the check sheet which accompanies every individual machine.”

Built-in customer support

Effectively providing service to its global customers is important to the Guild team. “This is something we’ve dramatically improved in the past 18 months,” explains Mr. Thomas. “Brainstorming with our service team has led to improvements and we have excellent control over this side of our business.” One of the ways in which Guild supports its international customers is with representatives located all around the world. Local representatives in Asia, China and Europe help them to reach customers and breach any cultural barriers.

“If there are service needs in a country where we don’t have a representative our US service team is ready to be dispatched 24/7 to anywhere in the world. That’s an important selling point for prospective clients. We also support our global customers by ensuring that when we build equipment, the components used can be sourced and serviced worldwide. This means a customer can contact the supplier of any component and actually get service as well. We are literally building in the assurance of global technical support when we design our equipment.”

“Our US service team is ready to be dispatched 24/7 to anywhere in the world”

People make the difference

It’s clear that the owners are passionate about the business. Mr. Thomas: “From a personal standpoint I believe that what sets Guild apart is not just our products,



Pictured left to right standing in front of a ready-to-be-shipped QMT Seam Welder are the three new owners of Guild International, Bill Maruschak, CFO; Joe Thomas, President; and Mark Wagner, Vice President of Sales. Standing with them is long time employee Lee Kothera, who has been with Guild International for over 35 years.

but our people, our service, our facilities and above all how we operate. Visitors are always impressed when they visit and see how we operate. Our staff is extremely knowledgeable and invested in what we produce. From product quality to the process, to customer service and care, our team ensures that everything runs perfectly. They have all come up through the ranks and can literally answer any question about our equipment. It’s a fantastic team.”

Goals for the future

In summing up, Mr. Thomas summarized the company’s goals for the future. “One of our primary goals is to keep advancing our technology and machinery. We’ve moved into laser welding but we still want to do more. It’s important for a company to keep their focus on the future, which is why we’ve taken on several highly qualified engineers to drive ahead the development of higher technology machines. All of

our technology has been developed 100% in-house and this creates a better product. Over the years we have learned that the only constant is change, so we are able to think on our feet and react when necessary.”



Facts & Figures

Name:	Guild International
Founded:	Since 1958
Headquarters:	7273 Division Street, Bedford, Ohio 44146, USA
Products:	Laser welders, ARC welders, resistance welders and tube mill entry machines
Website:	www.guildint.com