

Personality Profile...

Jim Foy Celebrates 50 Years

First Manufacturing Execution Software Supplied to Al Extruders

Of the 50 years Jim Foy has been working in the aluminum extrusion industry, 39 years have been dedicated to the company he founded in 1978, Foy Inc. Located in Farmersville, TX, the company provides software systems and programs for managing industry specific aspects of an extrusion operation. EPICS, a relational database management tool designed by Jim Foy, has been implemented in 100 extrusion plants in North America and around the world.

Jim entered into the aluminum extrusion business in 1967 at Alcoa's Lafayette, IN, plant, where he worked on developing practices for the company's new experimental indirect extrusion press. "Their Lafayette, IN, plant was impressive—over 20 extrusion presses, including two 14,000 ton presses, the largest presses in the world at the time," said Jim. "That plant was loaded with outstanding technical talent, and they helped inspire me to not only stay with the extrusion business but to immerse myself in it."

Jim's interest in computers and their capabilities began early on. "I was always fascinated by the power of computers," he said, noting that in the late '60s and early '70s, computers were primarily used for accounting and number crunching. "But from the time of my first job as an industrial engineer, I found various ways to use computers to solve engineering problems. I stole time on an early desktop programmable calculator in the Alcoa Planning department to run engineering calculations, and I purchased an early handheld calculator that put my desktop mechanical calculator to shame."

In 1970, Jim transitioned to Texas Aluminum Corp., in Rockwall, TX, which was the largest independent extruder in the U.S. at the time. As corporate director of Industrial Engineering at Texas Aluminum, Jim worked on an experimental indirect press known as the "Texas Press" that included innovative features such as segmented stems with varying hole counts. In 1974, Dick Pickens and Jim came together to start a new venture, Texas Extrusion Corporation, and founded a site for their extrusion facility in Farmersville, TX. Jim acted as president of Texas Extru-



Jim Foy.

sions, with Dick Pickens as owner and chairman of the board. The business model for Texas Extrusions involved the development of novel indirect presses based on the "Texas Press."

Jim carried his fascination with computers into all of these roles. "As president of Texas Extrusion, I purchased one of the first personal computers (a TRS-80 from Radio Shack) to put at our press for workorder calculation and production reporting," he said. "Extruders from around the world visited our facility, examining the indirect extrusion technology that we had developed, and many of them were intrigued with this computer." This interest from visitors encouraged Jim to leave Texas Extrusions and start Foy Enterprises in 1978 (later to become Foy Inc.), a company designed to install software for practice planning, press reporting, and tooling history. That early product, PS2, a concise MES tool tailored to extrusion manufacturers, later grew into Extrusion Production Information and Control System (EPICS), as new programming language and computing power was developed throughout the 1980s.

Shortly after starting up his new business, the recession in the 1980s hit, causing most manufacturers (extruders among them) to cut back on expenditures. Foy Inc. was able to ride out this recession, as well as the recession that occurred in 1990-91. Of this, Jim said, "We have successfully ridden out later recessions by instituting Software Service Policies, which guarantee our customers continuing support and updates in return for an annual fee. As a result, our revenue stream is fairly consistent, which means we have been able to continue with prod-

uct development and support in good times and bad."

EPICS has been updated multiple times, providing new capabilities for extrusion operations. The first complete rewrite of the system (since 2000) began in mid-2012. The company incorporated hundreds of suggestions from its user community and took advantage of the latest programming tools to deliver EPICS V9 (released in May 2014), the most powerful yet user-friendly version of the software to date.

Since 2010, the company has strengthened collaborations with other suppliers to link EPICS with shop-floor supervisory systems as well as other ERP and accounting systems. "Through all of this, Jim Foy has provided invaluable direction and guidance to our entire team based on his 50 years of experience in the industry," said John Stenger, vice president at Foy Inc. "Jim's single-minded focus on customer service has made EPICS the industry leader since 1978."

One of the things Jim has been most proud of over the years has been the long-term symbiotic relationships his company has formed with extrusion companies around the world. "For example, in the early 1980s, Western Extrusions was looking for manufacturing-oriented software to replace the homemade system they had outgrown," said Jim. "I installed one of the first multi-user versions of EPICS there, and we worked together to add features to the software. Now, over 30 years later, Western and Foy still work together to assure that EPICS meets their ever-increasing requirements."

Jim is now moving into semi-retirement. He expects to still be involved with Foy Inc. in a limited role, with more time off to participate in civic affairs and travel—secure in the knowledge that his company is in good hands. Looking back on his decades of work in aluminum extrusion, Jim said, "I have enjoyed associating with many outstanding individuals, especially the owners of independent extrusion companies. These leaders have been a pleasure to work with—often, I have struck a major deal based simply on a handshake. We have trusted each other, based on reputation and personal relationships. That has made it a real pleasure to do business."