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VOLUME 4, ISSUE 1

INSIGHTS FOR BUSINESS & LIFE

## A LONG HISTORY

HOW FERRIOT CONTINUES TO LIVE UP TO ITS LEGACY

Craig Ferriot,  
President,  
Ferriot Inc.

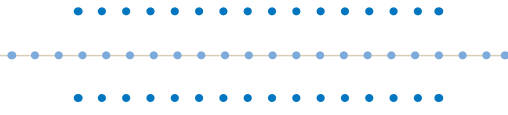
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Craig Ferriot,  
President,  
Ferriot Inc.



# MANUFACTURING MYSTERY

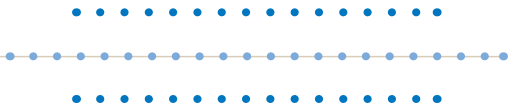
## HOW FERRIOT INC. CONTINUES TO LIVE UP TO A LONGSTANDING LEGACY

BY ERIK CASSANO

**C**an you name the Akron company that can trace its lineage back to the court of Queen Victoria?

Ferriot Inc. has been providing custom mold manufacturing, injection molding and a host of other manufacturing solutions for its customers since 1929, when the three Ferriot brothers started a machining business out of a garage on Storer Avenue. But the company traces its heritage to nearly a century before that and an ocean away.

When Queen Victoria ascended to the British throne in 1837, she sought master engravers to create her official royal seal and other royal emblems. Her search took her beyond Britain's borders to continental Europe, where her agents found a family of master engravers in France.



In 1850, second-generation members of that family immigrated to the United States to work for Tiffany & Co. in New York. Ten years later, one of them, Frederick E. Herrington, left New York to start his own die sinking company in Chicago. After building that company into a success, Benjamin Goodrich hired him to produce dies to create tire-wall designs for the B.F. Goodrich Co. in Akron.

While working for B.F. Goodrich, Herrington once again established his own company, the Art Die and Sinking Machine Co., on Bartges Street in Akron, along with his son, Ernst, and his son-in-law, Victor Ferriot. Following their father's death, Victor's sons Gene and Glenn became apprentices at a prominent mold and machine company in Akron.

All of which brings us to 1929, when Gene — a master engraver — and Glenn — a master machinist — started their own business out of Gene's garage on Storer Avenue. A third brother, Albert, also joined, bringing his master lens-grinding skills to the business. Later, after Albert's departure to Hollywood to make camera lenses for the movie industry, a fourth brother, Joe — a gifted artisan — joined the company.

That brings the company through the first 92 years. What's happened in the 86 years since — and what's going to happen in the coming years — is the rest of the story.

## CONSTANT EVOLUTION

So how does a family business evolve from engraving and machining to become a multi-faceted manufacturing solutions company? It happened step by step, in increments, over the span of decades. But the groundwork was laid in 1934, when the Ferriot brothers patented a process using beryllium copper to manufacture molds for the toy industry.

"That opened up an important chapter for our company," says Craig Ferriot, the third-generation president of Ferriot Inc. "It paved the way for us to develop an impressive client base, including toy giants such as Kenner and Mattel."

But think of toy manufacturing, and you probably think of one material in particular: molded plastic. Whether it's action figures, dolls, toy cars or planes, molded plastic represents the axis around which the industry rotates.

As World War II came to a close, the Ferriot brothers recognized how the developing plastics technology would shape their customers' businesses in the coming decades.

"By the mid-1940s, we were already taking steps to develop an injection molding division to service our toy customers," Ferriot says. "In doing so, we became one of the pioneers in injected thermoplastics. In some cases, we made the molds that were then shipped to an-

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other company for production, and in others, we made the mold and the product ourselves. In both cases, it built up our business even further, and it allowed us to look past our one or two areas of specialization to how we could really become a multiservice company."

As the injection molding division grew, the Ferriot family began discovering natural areas in which to offer add-on services. Customers often needed more than just a mold or a part; they needed a company that could paint and finish the part. Ferriot Inc. was well positioned to service its customers as a one-stop shop that could produce the mold and the part, and finish it, all under one roof.

"In the '50s, some of our customers came to us and asked us if we could start decorating the parts we were producing," Ferriot says. "That's how we started getting into plastic painting and staining, and began developing a customer base in the furniture industry."

Ferriot Inc.'s specialists began using the beryllium copper process the company first utilized in the 1930s to replicate wood-grain patterns on plastic paneling used in cabinetry







and chair manufacturing.

“The big advantage of the beryllium copper process is that it captures fine detail,” Ferriot says. “It captures a lot of the detail in the casting process. It made plastic an even more popular material for producing furniture, because you could now get that realistic wood-grain look. At that time, you couldn’t machine something like that into a metal surface.”

Through the 1970s, large electronics were often positioned as dominant pieces of furniture in a living room or family room, while radios and TVs were housed in cabinets made of wood, or a material that mimicked wood. For Ferriot Inc., that meant a natural jump to the electronics industry — and with it, one of the first home computer consoles.

In 1978, Ferriot Inc. produced plastic molds for a series of IBM personal computers, one of the first personal computers on the market.

“We started painting those parts, and it created yet another opening for us into the computer and business machine markets,” Ferriot says. “We became one of the leading suppliers of molded parts for the computer industry through the mid-2000s.”

But as Ferriot Inc. grew, the company diversified and moved from consumer goods into new emerging markets. In 1994, it entered the three-dimensional modeling space with a rapid-prototyping division — the forerunner to modern 3-D printing.

In 2007, Ferriot Inc. founded American Original Building Products LLC, a spinoff company that allowed it to move into the construction materials space.

“American Original Building Products LLC makes private-label products for different customers,” Ferriot says. “Specifically, it’s a type of injection-molded polypropylene siding that is used as external cladding on residential and commercial buildings. What makes it unique is that it’s a synthetic material that can accurately mimic the look and texture of cedar shake shingles. That’s become the newest growth area of our business.”

American Original Building Products continues to run as a separate operating entity focused on building and construction products, while Ferriot Inc. continues to evolve.

## FERRIOT TODAY

Recent changes at Ferriot include the addi-

tion of a service component to its array of offerings, providing customers with specialized engineering assistance. Ferriot provides design assistance at any stage of product development or production to aid clients in producing superior products. This value-added service, combined with Ferriot’s injection molding and product finishing businesses, has repositioned the company as a contract manufacturer, finding a niche where OEMs are focusing on core competencies and outsourcing some or all of their production.

The company meets the needs of its clients by providing end-to-end services, including streamlining the total manufacturing process, from supply-line development and management to process qualification, product testing, final assembly and drop shipping to the customer. With mobile, adaptable manufacturing modules, Ferriot can tailor processes to meet needs including short runs on assemblies with multiple parts.

With these added capabilities, it has found opportunities in major markets including medical devices, business machines, industrial equipment and electronic devices.

As medical technology continues to grow

at a rapid pace, Ferriot has found success with medical devices, delivering technical expertise regarding materials and processes used to produce parts that meet the demanding needs of the market. It also continues to build business machines for the banking industry and works in the industrial arena manufacturing products for the oil and gas industry, as well as components for industrial control valves and energy conservation. Ferriot focuses on growing in these areas and will continue to develop new opportunities as technologies evolve.

## BUILDING ON THE LEGACY

With such a long history, Ferriot and his team of 120 employees have a massive — but exciting — challenge as they continue building upon the company's legacy.

Ferriot says the company — which now employs fourth- and fifth-generation family members — is up to the task because of the way in which its people and processes are aligned. Ferriot Inc. is designed to be nimble and adaptable to the changing needs of its customers and the changing conditions of the markets it serves.

“We're very vertically integrated as a manufacturer,” Ferriot says. “We're positioned to move quickly when a customer comes to us with a product design. We can help them manufacture the mold, and then help them manufacture the product itself. Then we have the capacity to do any post-production work that's necessary. The fact that we can put all of those wheels in motion, and do it quickly, makes us a valuable partner for our customers.”

Ferriot Inc.'s recipe for adaptability is to stay small but make big investments in products, technology and development of human resources. The company has made large investments in assembly-line improvements, including robotic technology, to help increase the efficiency and capacity of its manufacturing operations.

“It's all about ensuring that it's easy to do business with us,” Ferriot says. “That's what sets us apart from the competition. We take

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part of the burden away from our customers. They want to develop, test and ship their products but might not want to manufacture them. That's where we come in, and that's why it's so important that we are able to respond quickly. A customer might decide relatively late in the development process that they want to farm out the manufacturing portion, and we have to be able to react to that.”

Knowledge is another critical element in positioning the company for future growth. To that end, Ferriot's team frequently attends trade shows and seminars relevant both to its own industry and to the industries of its customers and suppliers.

“We have many partners around the globe, so we're very aware of how important it is to stay current regarding what's going to be affecting our customers in the coming months and years,” Ferriot says.

And the need to attain knowledge extends to all corners of the company, including the team members on the shop floor.

“Maintaining a skilled and up-to-date work force is probably the biggest challenge we're facing today,” Ferriot says. “We're constantly putting in new training modules and programs to help take our employees to the next level. It

obviously is going to benefit our customers in the end, but it's also to benefit our people. If we're helping them advance in their careers by attaining new skills, they're even more valuable to the company, and they're going to want to stick around here because they know the company is investing in them. It's a big reason why our employees have been here more than 15 years, on average.”

## WORKING WITH FIRSTMERIT

No business goes it alone, and for more than 50 years, Ferriot Inc.'s banking partner has been FirstMerit Bank. As a pair of longstanding Akron-based companies, Ferriot Inc. and FirstMerit share many of the same values, a big reason that their relationship has endured for so long.

Ferriot utilizes an entire suite of financial tools from FirstMerit, including a line of credit, employee 401(k) management, direct deposit services, company bank accounts and treasury management services.

“There's a reason why we've been with them for so long,” Ferriot says. “They've been top-notch in responding to our needs as a company. They work very hard to understand what our needs are, and they are excellent at delivering what they promise.”

For those who manage FirstMerit's relationship with Ferriot, the feelings of trust and alignment are mutual.

“We've been with them for just about every step of their growth, and they've been a great client for us,” says Jim Eckleberry, the Ferriot Inc. relationship manager for FirstMerit. “They have always come to us when they need help with their financial services. They've grown along with us, and as important as anything, they get involved when we ask them to get involved. If we need information from them, they get it to us. They help us help them, and you can't ask for much more than that as a banking partner.” ♦

For more information, visit [www.ferriot.com](http://www.ferriot.com).