

Ulbrich: 90 years and four generations

Employing 700 workers worldwide, Ulbrich Stainless Steels and Special Metals, Inc., is a family owned and operated global precision re-roller and distributor of stainless steel strip, special metals strip, foil, shaped wire, fine wire, sheet, plate, bar and PV ribbon products. A leader in the field of distributing stainless and other specialty metals such as titanium and cobalt, Ulbrich's products are known worldwide for their excellent reliability and superior performance in critical applications.

Headquartered in North Haven, Connecticut with an additional 12 manufacturing sites located in five countries across North America, Europe and Asia. Ulbrich continually supplies their customers with metals that are engineered to enhance and improve a wide variety of processes. The company's products are used across many industries including: aerospace, oil and gas, chemical processing, power generation and even the medical sector. Ulbrich is known for solving their customer's problems and creating metal solutions for their individualized needs.

Stainless Steel World Americas had the pleasure of speaking with Ulbrich's CEO, Mr. Chris Ulbrich, about the company's rich history, its vast product offerings and what's next for the business.

By Candace Allison

Chris' grandfather, Fred Ulbrich Sr., founded Ulbrich in 1924, which started as a scrap metal reselling business in Wallingford, Connecticut. Soon after, the business began making cutlery and during World War II won a contract to supply zinc knives for the U.S. Army's mess kits. It was then that the company invested in its first rolling mill, which helped transform the business from a utensils manufacturer to a custom stainless strip operation. In the late 1940s and 1950s, when the jet aircraft industry started growing, a demand was created for high performance metals such as titanium. Ulbrich then started investing in state-of-the-art quality control systems and modern manufacturing equipment before offering specialty alloys such as nickel and titanium alongside the stainless steel.

Fred Ulbrich Jr.'s legacy

It was in the mid-1950s when Chris' father, Fred Ulbrich, Jr. started his career with Ulbrich by working in the factories following his service in the U.S. Army. In the 1960s, he launched a sales team, comprising of direct sales people, before taking over the role of CEO from his father in 1969. Even in this senior management role, he always made sure to instill in his sales group the importance of forming solid supplier relationships and earning the customer's trust with quality products and services. It should then be no surprise that these best practices are still an integral part of the company today, helping it to grow substantially from making one million in sales in 1963 to over 400 million in 2014.



Fred Ulbrich, Jr.

Fred Jr. recently passed away at the age of 83, but he will be remembered for his forward thinking ideas and best practices that were well ahead of their time. For instance, he was an early proponent of adhering to the customers' needs. He was quoted as saying, "Our philosophy in the early years is the same as it is now: give customers what they need, when they need it and do your best to exceed their expectations." In today's business world, this way of thinking is commonplace, but 40 years ago it was groundbreaking.

The Ulbrich revolution

Long before it was mainstream, Fred Ulbrich, Jr. also believed a company's long-standing success was a direct result of the



The proud Ulbrich team posing outside the North Haven, CT headquarters.

people who worked for it. Despite the many production and material capabilities that Ulbrich always offers its customers, at the end of the day the company's employees are the ones who make all the difference. This philosophy was fully realized in the late 1990s, when Fred Jr. launched The Ulbrich Revolution. It relied on the following four principles: Total Customer Responsiveness, Total Company Involvement, Total Quality Commitment and Continuous Professional Development.

Chris explained that even though these four tenets speak for themselves, the main aspect is that the company makes decisions as a team and that all employees feel empowered to do their best. As his father believed before him, if people are given the right tools, they have the ability to function at least two levels higher than they normally would. It's a win-win situation because then the worker is satisfied and happy because they have job enrichment and as a result the company prospers. Ulbrich has been implementing this strategy for decades long before big name companies like Google or IBM made it their mandate.

Chris emphasized, "This is one of the blessings of a family company. We don't have the resources of those aforementioned companies, but what's exciting is that a company like ours can do a lot more things. The Ulbrich Revolution that my father started really changed our company because it encouraged all of our staff to get involved. In turn, Ulbrich saw continuous professional and quality improvement people improved with their trade, whether they were a metallurgist or an electrician. Even today, we are still committed to the revolution's four principles."

The next generation

These enduring values help to ensure that the company's highly skilled team of metallurgists, product managers, engineers, equipment operators and professional sales staff work together in a positive environment that encourages everyone to focus their talents and energies in a common direction that is best for both them and the company.

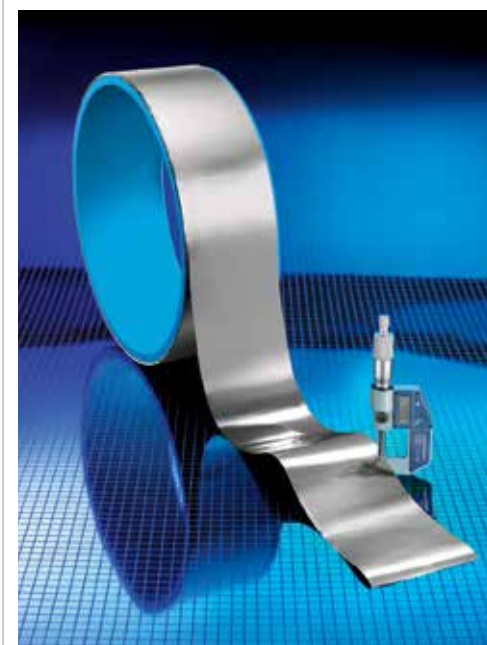
This shared vision has resulted in nine decades and four generations of company

success and milestones—a rarity in the world of privately owned companies. Chris is currently the third generation in his family to operate the business. His three sons, the fourth generation, are also now with the company. The shared goal is to keep the company going strong, which everyone believes is attainable thanks to the solid company foundations laid out by both Fred Sr. and Jr.

The company today

Currently, Ulbrich services its clients in North America, Europe and Asia, although as Fred Ulbrich, Jr. was famous for saying, "If our customers are in Antarctica, we'd be there too. We'd follow our customers to Antarctica if need be." The company's staff of skilled and experienced engineers, product managers and sales executives are always on hand to help with both material selection and production requirements. All customers, regardless of their industry are given personalized material solutions that are designed to suit their individual needs and manufacturing processes. This can be anything from restricting material chemistry, narrowing mechanical property ranges for forming, tension leveling for flatness or providing a shaped edge for semi-finished product.

As Chris clarified, "We have a large metallurgy staff and technical sales team so we are



An example of some of the ultra-thin foil that Ulbrich offers.

worth of quality precision products



able to help our customers solve problems. For example, if someone is making a cap for a particular part in a car and there is a crack in it, we can help resolve those types of issues. Another important service that we offer is the ability to do smaller quantities. If a customer needs 30,000 pounds, they can go to a major mill, but if they only need 1,000 pounds, which can be common in industries like chemical processing, then they can come to us and we also have the technical expertise to help them."

Trusted products

Ulbrich offers an extensive array of products including: strip, foil, shaped wire, fine wire, sheet, plate, bar and PV ribbons in a variety of stainless steel, special metals, nickel alloys, titanium, cobalt, niobium, nitinol and other exotic alloys. Their selection of stainless steel alone offers a large range of grades within the categories of austenitic (such as 316L Stainless), martensitic (420 Stainless), ferritic (436 Stainless), precipitation hardening (A286 Stainless) and duplex (Duplex 2205). Titanium is an example of one of their specialty products and is used for various industrial and medical applications.

Since the beginning, clients have used all of these metals in extremely precise and complex applications. There can be no chance of failure because the consequences of such a failure would be absolutely catastrophic for the customer. As Fred Ulbrich, Jr. said, "Good enough just ain't good enough, it has to be perfect." In order to achieve perfection, all of the Ulbrich facilities, whether it manufactures specialty strip metal, precision flat wire or shaped wire, must follow the corporate mandate to meet the international quality standards in addition to the specific quality standards of the regions, industries and key multinational manufacturers (OEMs) they service.

As such, all locations are ISO 9001:2008 (International Organization for Standardization) certified in addition to the other certifications such as the highly sought after, but difficult to obtain, Laboratory Control at Source (LCS) accreditation and the National Aerospace and Defense Contractors Accreditation Program (NADCAP) qualification. These certifications allow customers the certainty of the quality of their metal products.

Industry trends

When asked about the industry trends he has noticed recently, Chris was quick to respond, "The industry is getting lighter, cleaner and we always need more energy. We need cleaner water and cleaner air in the world and our products are used for all of this. Cars are burning hotter to get more mileage so they need more nickel alloys and other alloys in the engines. Same thing with water environments where there are filters, boilers and smoke stacks, there's stainless steel in all of them. We have taken oil wells deeper, which means they need more corrosive metals."

He further explained that this global need for cleaner and smaller solutions is especially relevant in the aerospace and medical sectors. For example, Ulbrich's metals are being used in the airplane engine parts as well as medical innovations like left ventricular assist devices (LVADs). "My father had an LVAD unit. It is a mechanical part around the size of a coke can and the heart is hooked up to it, basically it's like your car going 24 hours a day. We even made the metal for it. It was amazing. It's an exciting time with all the new inventions that are coming out in medicine."

According to Chris, it's an important time to be in the metals business because



there is such a wide variety of people and industries that are being dealt with. In the span of one week he can have a meeting with a medical company and then go golfing with an acquaintance in the oil business. Power generation is one of the newest sectors that Ulbrich has become involved with. The company has invested in some rolling equipment for their solar division, in order to meet the demand for power generation segment.

involve the outside environment such as the 2009 financial crisis, the current situation in Ukraine and the embargo on Russia, where titanium is often sourced. His team knows how to make quality products and service their customers, but the ongoing challenge is the world events that cannot be controlled.

Despite these difficulties, the entire Ulbrich team remains optimistic. "We are reorganizing a little bit after my father's



The three generations of Ulbrich. From left to right: Mark Ulbrich (Chris' son), Fred Ulbrich, Jr. (former CEO and Chairman of the Board), Chris Ulbrich (CEO) and Jonathan Ulbrich (Chris' son). Missing from the photo is Chris' other son, Weston.

Upcoming projects

Ulbrich is always on the lookout for expansion and new markets. The team attends trade shows to learn about the latest trends, but Chris maintains that it is also a challenging time because nickel is on the rise and so are prices. It's also a world market and it is uncertain what the outcome will be with some of the international events currently taking place. He says that most of the industry challenges

passing away, but we are focused on our mission and being able to offer new products. In general, products are becoming lighter. We have a lot of employees working with customers on these new challenges. We are just continuing and seeing where some of these markets go, such as the aircraft market, which is very strong. We have a budget plan and we will adhere to that plan. We're confident that in ten years time, we'll be celebrating our 100th anniversary!"

Ulbrich at a glance

Company Name:	Ulbrich Stainless Steels and Special Metals, Inc.
President & CEO:	Chris Ulbrich
Number of employees:	700 worldwide
Headquarters:	153 Washington Ave., North Haven, Connecticut, USA 06473
Distribution:	Europe, North America and Asia
Products:	Stainless steel strip, special metals strip, foil, shaped wire, fine wire, sheet, plate, bar and PV ribbon products.
Industry markets:	Automotive, power generation, medical, aerospace, oil and gas, chemical processing, electronics and commercial products.
Website:	www.ulbrich.com

