

# people to know

## LEARNING TO FLY

Flying planes and fly fishing are two of the many things that keep Bo Bovard busy.

**WHEN IT COMES** to the average industrial facility, the office and the manufacturing space are two different worlds. The office is quiet, the shop is loud and there's a distinct line between the two.

At Augusta Iron and Steel Works, Inc. (AISW), however, that line is blurred. Actually, it's not even there. Instead, the engineers and executives of the AISC member/AISC certified bridge fabricator in Augusta, Ga., work in offices in the middle of the manufacturing space. Not only does this unorthodox setup help to keep overhead down, but it also creates more of a connection between the shop floor and the design and management side of things—although sometimes it can be a bit loud.

"We've discussed building a new office building," says AISW's president, Bo Bovard. "However, to survive in the bridge fabricating business, capital needs to be invested in things that produce a return on investment. I've never believed that palatial offices carry much ROI. In addition, I get to walk through the shop multiple times per day, and that's a good thing."

Bovard has been with AISW since 1983 and has seen the ups and downs of the bridge construction market in his time with the company. The early to mid-90s were a very difficult time in the bridge business, and the shareholders voted to liquidate the company in 1997. The bearing division was sold to a Massachusetts firm, along with a lease on one of the two plant facilities. Bovard bought the fabricating division and the larger plant. Following the liquidation, the company closed for one week then reopened with 28 employees, down from more than 100. Work was scarce at that point, with the only backlog being the unfinished jobs from before the liquidation and not a lot of prospects for the future.

Business has since improved, though the workload is heavily influenced by the ebbs and flows of transportation work and highway funding bills. The shop has employed up to 85 full-time employees and has exceeded sales revenues of the old company without the burden of two plants or a formal corporate office building.

"We've been very fortunate and worked very hard to be both a low-cost and a quality producer," Bovard says. "Last year we only made one trip to the field to correct one stiffener location."

Despite working in the steel industry for nearly three decades, Bovard's background is not in steel. He graduated from North Carolina State University with a degree in chemical engineering and went to work for Hercules Chemical Company—first as a plant engineer at the company's Brunswick, Ga., facility, working on equipment design and optimization, then in a sales role, which took him to Shreveport, La. He eventually joined AISW in a product development position and has been with the company ever since. As a matter of fact, his son is also working for AISW.

"He's now finished business school and is working with us in sales and marketing," says Bovard. "It is a real pleasure to see him learning the business and developing his own relationships."

In 2001, Bovard recognized the value of adding a plane for business travel. He took lessons at Augusta's Daniel Field Airport and has been an instrument-rated, licensed pilot for 11 years now. He owns a Cirrus SR22, which has been very beneficial to business development and general business travel. Bovard finds himself in the air at least four times a month, visiting customers and sites in Charlotte, Atlanta, Birmingham, St. Louis, Dallas and other locations around the Southeast. He also takes the occasional non-business-related trip.

"We have been fortunate enough to make a few fun trips like Key West, New Orleans and visiting kids at college," he says.

In addition to flying airplanes, Bovard enjoys restoring old cars. His favorites are early 1960s Porsche 356 convertibles. He is also an avid fly fisherman, both fresh and saltwater. Most weekends will find him somewhere on the water, stalking the wily mountain trout or a low country redfish. At home, he plays vintage acoustic guitars.

"I'm not a very talented player, but I really appreciate the craftsmanship and sound of vintage instruments," he says.

A friend who plays bluegrass music professionally has shared his interest in-turn-of-the-century "Claw Hammer" banjo playing.

"If I'm a marginal guitarist, I really stink at the banjo!" he laughs. "But, I've only been working on it a few months, so it has to get better, right?"

When not "ironing and stealing," as the old joke goes, Bovard is very involved in the Augusta community, having served on numerous boards.

"I really enjoy giving back to the community," he says. "Some of my favorites have been the Aviation Commission, the Salvation Army, Historic Augusta and several charitable foundations. I just wish there were a few more hours in each day!" **MSC**



◀ Bovard, accompanied by two Porsches.