



FRESHLY MINTED JOB SHOP

Can Tech Laser and Metals Inc., Mississauga, ON

BY NESTOR GULA

Starting a business is an exciting endeavour. Mixed feelings occasionally arise--hope for future success yet fear of the challenges ahead. Of course there is lots of work and pre-planning, and ideally there are customers waiting as you open your front door.

When Nik Sharma and his partner, Sarbjit Hunjan, opened Can Tech Laser and Metals Inc. this past June, their hopes were high, but their plans and potential client lists were sparse.

Sharma first came to Canada in 1988 from the Punjab region in India. Completing his schooling here, he worked as a press brake operator at a shop in Etobicoke,



ON until it shut down. He's held various different jobs in the metal forming sector, but then he got his real estate ticket and became a relatively successful broker in the west end of the Greater Toronto Area.

"There were lots of opportunities to work in sheet metal at that time, and I worked for quite a few different companies, but it was not consistent with what I wanted to do," says Sharma.

Through his various jobs and success at real estate, Sharma continued to harbour a feeling that he wanted to open up his own metal job shop.

"It is something that I always wanted to do," he says. He wanted to start up something even in 2002, but the time was not right. "When the right time comes, things that have to happen will happen."

Sharma met Hunjan, who was also working in the sheet metal sector as a laser system operator, in 2002, and the two kept in touch. This past January, Sharma contacted Hunjan and in February they went to Fabtech Canada together.

"We were still trying to see what we want to do, and what we can do," says Sharma. What they did was purchase an Amada LGC 3015 fiber laser cutting system and HFE M2 1303 press brake at the show. They were the floor models, according to Sharma.

Together the two spent the month of March putting together their business plan, and then in the first week of April started their company. "We had the Amada machines, but we still did not have a place to put them," recalls Sharma. "We got this place the first week of May, and the delivery of the machines was June 2nd. We were opened pretty soon after that."

Their 7,000 square foot facility is located near Dixie Road and Highway 401 in Mississauga, ON, and there are now six employees including the two partners.

Getting the machines and manufacturing space was the easy part—getting customers is a whole different thing. Hunjan had never left the metal industry so he still had contacts in the sector, and Sharma is a salesman. Orders started to come in.

"We started talking to potential customers at about the same time as we started the company," says Hunjan. "We have done pretty good in this time." For a company less than half a year into its operation, it is moving forward, according to the owners.

"In the past two and a half months we have hit the numbers that they predicted," said Sharma. "We are doing okay. We have people who are working, and we are training them."

Not having a firm slate of customers never worried Sharma. "I think that business is there--it is the approach you have and the customer service you provide. That is the key," he says.

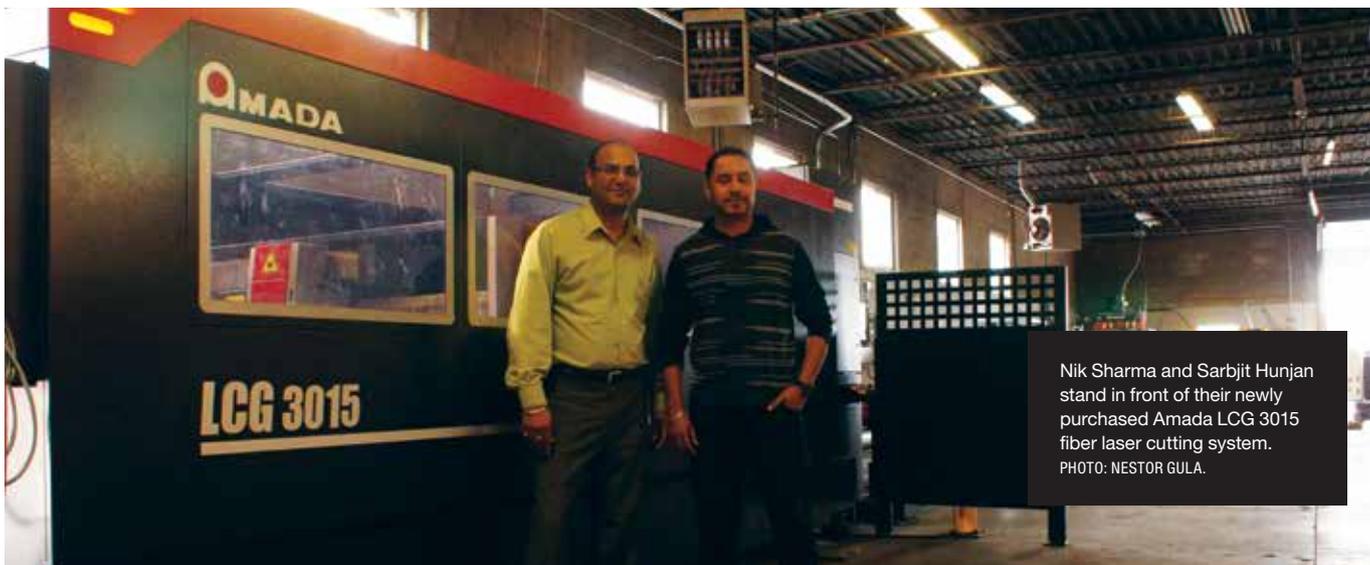
"Right now we are dealing with displays and showcase work. We have dealt with some auto industry parts, laser cutting and bending them. There have been some custom jobs in the past two months." He also notes that they have some sales people out drumming up business, and that there are a lot of jobs working with stainless steel. They have mostly small-run custom jobs for now but are looking for the big jobs.

"They will start coming," says Sharma confidently. "Starting from scratch, two months ago, with no customers, we had no idea what the future would be." The start-up was a big risk, but it's paying off.

"We had some potential customers, but we did not know if we would get any orders from them or what the volume would be," says Hunjan. "Initially we would get orders to make two items and another for five. Now we



The newly established 7,000 square foot shop boasts two new Amada machines.
PHOTO: NESTOR GULA.



Nik Sharma and Sarbjit Hunjan stand in front of their newly purchased Amada LCG 3015 fiber laser cutting system. PHOTO: NESTOR GULA.

get purchase orders for 100 of one unit and 60 of another. The customers like what we are doing, our product, our equipment, our craft, and our service."

Most of the work they have now is creating store fixtures. "There are always a lot of stores opening and they need fixtures for their displays," explains Sharma. The stores have to exude an air of quality and so the fixtures and display have to reflect the same quality.

Sharma and Hunjan are pleased with their Amada machines because they can provide the quality their customers demand, and paying attention to their customers' needs is what they see as their pathway to success. Incidentally, this is what turned them on to purchasing equipment from Amada. Both partners had used other equipment in their various stints as metalworkers.



Nik Sharma examines the control panel of the Amada HFE M2 1303 press brake. PHOTO: NESTOR GULA.

"The main thing behind choosing Amada, is because of the service." They met the Amada representatives at Fabtech in February, and spoke with several Amada customers in the Greater Toronto Area. They were impressed with the tales of Amada's customer support.

"The thing that I like best, and what the companies we visited also said, is that when we call them [Amada] they are here," says Sharma.

"They will show up the same day or the next. The service is great. We do not get voice mail, we get help very quickly."

He also notes that the supplier has been very supportive. "The delivery was right on time, and the set-up and installation was done well. If there are problems, for any issue that we need, they are there to help us. I think they are great with small businesses and newcomers like us. Service wise they are very unique."

The machines are no slouches either. The LCG is a flying optic laser system that can cut up to 3/4-inch mild steel, 3/8-inch stainless steel and 5/16-inch aluminum. It boasts a repeatability tolerance of plus/minus 0.0002-inches. The HFE M2 press brake contains production-enhancing features such as a large open height, a large throat depth, a narrow lower beam and a large distance between the side frames.

With a 146-ton capacity, an 18.5-inch open height, and a 7.87-inch stroke, this bender boasts a plus minus 0.0004-inch ram repeatability. Both machines are accurate and efficient according to Sharma.

"We looked at the energy consumption figures for different machines and the Amada had the best," says Hunjan.

Working with the machines for the past two months the partners are happy. The machines are accurate and if there is a question they know the Amada technical staff will assist them. "Even if it is a small thing like nesting," said Hunjan. "I can just call Amada and they will help me and teach me how to do it properly.

Their technicians have the experience and that is an asset for us. That is something that came with the machine." The 50 plus years of experience that Amada has gained in the industry is shared with the customers and comes with the machine according to Sharma.

"The staff and technicians that Amada has are very well trained," he says. "If you have a question they will have answers. They have never said no." **CM**