

New steel technology enables long strides ahead for Christchurch business

A leading-edge sheet metal folding machine is enabling a Christchurch business to take big steps forward in the manufacture of flashings and other metal products for the building industry.

Woolston-based G&A Harris, a sheet metal engineering firm which has been in business for over 60 years, imported the machine – which is the first of its kind in New Zealand – from Switzerland in June last year. G&A Harris' customers are now benefitting from the new machine's ability to fold longer and thicker sheets of metal, as well as a number of previously-impossible folding profiles that can be used to create decorative architectural features.

Phil Botting, who has owned and operated G&A Harris with his wife Karen since 2016, says the impressive new machine – a Thalmann TD200 CNC double folder – is a state-of-the-art piece of equipment which is already providing better efficiency and output speed for customers.

"We're thrilled with the new machine and what it's enabling us to provide for our customers. One of the key benefits so far is speed – we're getting through the work much more quickly than before," Phil says. "Everything is computerised, so the specifications can be entered into the machine via a touchscreen, rather than setting the angle of each fold manually, as is required on the older machines."

INFINITE RANGE

Producing longer flashings on the new machine also means fewer flashing pieces and fewer joints, which results in quicker installation time onsite.

The machine can also store customers' files on its own server, so parts can be reproduced exactly to the same specifications if required. This has already proven invaluable, says Phil.

"We recently had a situation where some of our flashings were accidentally damaged onsite. As the flashings had been made on the new machine with the files saved on the server, we could automatically replicate identical products, whereas previously we would have had to readjust and input the angles again manually. It made the replacement process a whole lot faster and more accurate, and the new flashings were onsite the next day."

A further benefit of the new machine is its ability to fold extra-long pieces of sheet metal in lengths up to 6.4 m and aluminium up to 3 mm thick.

The new Thalmann equipment also has an in-built slitter which can cut long strips of metal to the correct girth before folding.

In addition, G&A Harris can now produce tapered flashings, flashings with radii and sleeved flashings, as well as making up to three flashings in the machine at the same time.

Perhaps the most exciting of the machine's many capabilities is the ability to produce decorative fold profiles which no other manufacturers in the industry in New Zealand can achieve, Phil says.

"The machine allows us to offer an almost infinite range of custom architectural cladding options, which is highly exciting. We can do some really tight folds which can be used for impressive visual effects, as well as curved radius folds which other machines can't do," he says. "This opens up the ability for us to do really interesting bespoke profiles for cladding and decorative architectural features."

PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

G&A Harris has been a fixture in the Canterbury construction landscape since the 1950s, when brothers Gordon and Alf Harris began supplying sheet metal products to the commercial and residential building industry. The company has changed hands three times since its inception, with the current owners Karen and Phil Botting purchasing the

G&A Harris owner/operator Phil Botting with their new Thalmann double folder – the machine can fold longer and thicker sheets of metal as well as create decorative architectural features

business three years ago along with its partner business, Trotter Powder Coating.

Karen and Phil employ a team of experienced, specialist sheet metal craftspeople, some of whom have worked in the business for many years. The team produce a wide variety of products from aluminium, stainless steel, copper or almost any other sheet metal product. Exterior strip drains, shower drains, chimney caps and rainwater heads are just a few of the other products the team can fabricate.

Bringing the business' operations, systems and processes into the modern age is one of the Bottings' key areas of focus, with the new Thalmann double folder a key recent investment. Other changes include G&A Harris having just moved into a larger renovated building in Dyers Road, with Trotter Powder Coating to join them in the new facility in the coming weeks. This will include a significantly bigger powder coating plant, capable of coating the larger items coming off the new machine.

Technology is a further area which is undergoing rapid improvement within the business, says Karen. "We can have 100 jobs a day go through the factory, so we're looking at leading-edge electronic job-tracking systems which will replace the traditional paper-based systems and help us become much more efficient through the ordering and fabrication process," she says.

"We're also looking at how we can make it easier and more intuitive for customers to place orders and track their progress."

In recent years, G&A Harris has provided flashings and architectural profiles for a variety of large, high-profile commercial developments in Christchurch, including the hospital, the Town Hall, the Crowne Plaza Hotel and The Crossing retail centre, as well as a number of architectural homes.

"We're very proud of our team and the high-quality products we're able to supply to our customers. With the new machine now fully bedded in and the move to the new factory, we're looking forward to a really exciting future," Karen says.

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