

## Ohio Contractor Completes Heavenly Project

Local millwork and cabinetry contractor Civitas Cleveland Ltd. worked nearly around the clock to create a handmade, 20-foot wooden altar to permanently hold the miter (ceremonial hat) of the late Pope John Paul.

Chuck Gliha, owner of the Cleveland, Ohio-based Civitas, had just a few weeks to create the ornate container/altar. The finished product was installed at St. Stanislaus Church in Cleveland's Slavic village neighborhood on March 30. A formal dedication of the altar and the miter was held April 18.

To assist in the project, the Ohio Regional Council of Carpenters secured the right to use a UBC union label so it could be applied to the altar. As a result, the altar carries UBC label number 710 – a certification that this



special display case for Pope John Paul's miter was built by skilled and expert carpenters under a set of fair wage and benefit conditions.

"His dedication to get this project completed was unbelievable," said Bob Macko, millwork and

**Tim Riffle (sculptor), Father Mike, and Chuck Gliha (owner of Civitas Cleveland, Ltd. and a member of Local 1542) are seen here in front of the new altar.**

cabinetry business representative with the Ohio and Vicinity Regional Council of Carpenters. "The skill and productivity of a trained union craftsman were certainly evident in this finished product."



# millworks ARCHITECTURAL

THE QUARTERLY PUBLICATION OF THE CERTIFIED CUSTOM WOODWORKERS ASSOCIATION

## Automation becomes part of the process in union millwork shops across the country

### CONTRACTOR/PROJECT FOCUS

For two decades we have heard the mantra from the experts: Automation is the future of the cabinetmaking business. That is no longer true. Automation is not the future. It is the present.

"I don't think any shop that does not buy into the new way of doing things is going to be around very long," said Dave Markland, vice president and co-owner of Commercial Woodworking in St. Louis, Missouri. "The days of using a lathe or table saw without automation are just a thing of the past. The little guy can't be competitive."

It's simply a market thing, Markland said.

"Automation allows a wider spectrum on the scope of work you can do, greater control of quality and increased production. With greater volume, you can decrease your prices."

Commercial Woodworking started 10 years ago with 10 people and a table saw. It now employs 70 workers and uses bar coding, a CNC beam saw, automated table saws and



Commercial Woodworking's Edge Bander



edge banding. The machines all "talk" to each other via a central computer.

"It's allowed us to increase capacity, stabilize quality and cut down on mistakes," Markland said.

Another case in point is LegereWoodworking in Avon, Connecticut, which bills itself as the largest architectural millwork firm on the East Coast with 120 employees.

Legere got started on the road to automation in 1994 with its first CNC machine. It took the big step in 2001 when it invested about \$2 million to add two CNC routers and moved to a 180,000 square-foot location.

"We decided to compete with the big guys, we really have to look at how we do things

### Two back-to-back Legere Schelling CNC Panel Saws

and upgrade," said Legere Vice President Bill Bruneau.

At the same time, Legere changed the way it operated by adopting what Bruneau calls nested-based manufacturing.

"It's a little different from typical manufacturing. Typically, what manufacturers do is take their CNC panel saws and optimize all their parts on a panel saw and all the parts go to the CNCs. And from the CNCs, they go to the edge banders and from the edge banders, they start to get put together.

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# Detroit carpenters gain comprehensive skill sets in millwork and cabinetry training program

When Chris Suisham talks to his students at the Detroit Carpenters Apprentice School about what makes a great cabinet-maker, he stresses that patience is not only a virtue. It is an outright necessity.

“You have to be patient and that’s not a skill set that everyone has,” he says. “Some people want to run as fast as they can run. Sometimes with cabinets you have to say ‘Today is a one-cup-of-coffee day.’ Everything has to look good at the end of the job.”

Suisham says that getting that point across is not always easy.

“It’s hard to teach someone how to be patient – how to stay focused,” he said. “You tell them, this is a \$1,000 piece of material and you don’t want to slam it through a saw.”

Suisham, 35, has the rapt attention of his students as he walks among them, commenting on their techniques as they work on their projects – building and laminating toolboxes at the school in suburban Ferndale, just a mile north of Detroit.

The school, built in the mid-1970s, is bright and well-maintained. Five instructors teach 16 classes from laminating to interior trim to flooring. It has a CNC router and thousands of feet of floor space.

*“An individual coming out of this training is so far ahead that it’s not even comparable,” Kissel says. “We’re competing against contractors who call their workers apprentices, but they don’t get the training.”*

“The challenge is keeping the curriculum up to date – that and keeping the material up to date. The material is constantly changing,” says Don Kissel, who is in his



**Chris Suisham, and Detroit Carpenters Apprentice School in Ferndale, Mich.**

more than carpentry being taught here,” Kissel says.

One of the other things being taught is safety. Every student wears safety glasses, work boots, a long-sleeved shirt and other safety equipment required for a particular class.

“Cabinetmaking takes good core talents – first in learning to use the tools so you don’t hurt yourself or anyone else,” Suisham says. “You have to be respectful of power tools.”

Suisham says keeping everyone in the class on the same page is sometimes difficult.

“It’s more of a speed issue,” he says. “Some people have a little trouble with power tools while others, you give them a pocket knife and a print, and they can build a shopping mall. I try to move the class as fast as I can, but you can’t really push guys beyond their skill levels. If they go too fast, it becomes a safety thing.”

Another issue is the apprentice who thinks he’s already a journeyman.

“One problem is guys who think they know more than me,” Suisham says. “I tell them ‘If you’re not going to let me help you, I can’t help you.’ There may be several ways of doing something, but I tell them I’m here and so I’m doing it my way. Most guys will take that, but some will fight you.”

It is a labor of love for Suisham.

“I love my job,” he says. “It’s a lot of fun and sometimes a guy will come up to you and say ‘Thanks for helping me. The training really helped.’ I think to succeed at being a carpenter, you really have to want to be a carpenter. You have to like to work with tools.”

third year as director of the school. “But we do, and we are proud that union training is the best training.”

Apprentices take classes every other week for 12 weeks, giving them 48 hours of class time. Up to 500 apprentices are enrolled at any one time.

“An individual coming out of this training is so far ahead that it’s not even comparable,” Kissel says. “We’re competing against contractors who call their workers apprentices, but they don’t get the training.”

He says that in addition to skills training at the school, students learn about punctuality, responsibility and respect. “There’s a lot

## Automation becomes part of the process in union millwork shops across the country (continued from page 1)

“We don’t do that. Say you had an order for 300 cabinets. You have to wait until all the parts go through all those machines before you can start assembling. That can take two weeks. With nested-based manufacturing, you would still use panel saws to optimize the parts, but they’re not the machined parts. The machined parts get optimized on the CNC machining centers. So you’re putting a full sheet up on the CNC machining center that gives you all the parts for two-and-a-half cabinets.

“Within four hours you’re assembling cabinets. That first day you’re assembling parts. We install our own parts. We’re a union shop. We’re constantly feeding the field. We send out smaller trucks, which keeps our install crews smaller. It kind of like goes hand in hand with lean manufacturing, where you do smaller batches quicker.”

Legere also has gone into “smart labeling.”



Considering that a CNC machine costs between \$50,000 and \$80,000, offset that against efficiencies, productivity and the increased volume of output the contractor can expect to achieve.

Sampson said that automation is not absolutely essential, but it will become increasingly common.

“You certainly can run a cabinet shop successfully and profitably with conventional machinery. But in order to do so, you’re going to have to have some skilled folks. I think that more and more shops view it as a tool and not a threat. It has a lot of advantages in material handling issues and beyond production. You put a piece of material into a machine and out come parts. You don’t have to take that material around to two or three different machines in your shop.



**The Legere case assembly area**

“In the cabinetmaking market, basically people seem to be divided into two camps. Ones that already have the CNC machine and ones that need to think about whether they need to have one for their business.”

“For the United Brotherhood of Carpenters in Connecticut, the challenge is adapting to automation and making sure our apprenticeship programs are keeping up to date with the new skills required,” said Glenn Miller, the representative for Local Union 210.

“It would be beneficial to overall productivity to have the people who are doing the computer programming be part of the union,” he said. “It’s not part of our contractual language now, although we’re looking to go in that direction. A lot of programmers have come out of the shops and many retain their union membership. But it’s not specifically laid out in the contract language.”

It’s called living in the present. Because automation, once a trend of the future, has truly arrived.

## From Your Labor-Management Committee Chairmen:



### So close and yet so far

This specialty craft that we explore in each issue of *Millworks* is as diverse as the contractors and their employees who complete work in this industry everyday. In this issue, we focus on two factors that, arguably, are on opposite ends of the spectrum.

Automation. Who isn’t talking about automation in our field? As our feature article so clearly explains, leveraging automation to remain profitable is more of a necessity than a luxury. Today’s fabrication equipment implements specifications and meets the needs of customers with efficiency and precision. And automation makes good financial sense – the cost of equipment can pay for itself quickly thanks to an increase in jobs that can be bid, more efficient use of materials and higher labor productivity.

To keep up in our competitive marketplace, smart shop owners know that getting everything done faster and better means automating.

A skilled carpenter is one key to making automated systems operate efficiently. Our feature about the Detroit training program serves as a stark reminder that the skills of a union millworker or cabinetmaker are both tangible and intangible. Union-trained craftsmen simply have the patience, the eye for detail, drive for perfection and an unrelenting work ethic. That sets them apart.”

No amount of automation will ever replace the instincts of a veteran craftsman. And even the best carpenter can’t match the speedy accuracy of automation. Opposite ends of the spectrum in our field? Maybe. Undeniably intertwined and the key to a successful shop? Certainly.