



Vested Metals: A bright and shiny business success story

By Colleen Jones
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So how is it that someone ends up in such a specific niche field like metal fabrication and then grows that company to dizzying heights within five years of launching?

If you're Viv Helwig, it's a chance connection with someone in the Big Steel industry of eastern Pennsylvania.

Helwig, founder and president of the Vested Metals raw material distribution company in St. Augustine, recalled in a recent interview with The Record how he got his humble start in the business.

It was 2008 — smack in the midst of the economic recession — when Helwig left Flagler College with a bachelor's degree in business administration.

"It wasn't the best time to be graduating from college," Helwig said with a laugh.

He was thinking about going into real estate or to grad school. In the meantime, Helwig was working in the admissions office at his alma mater. He became friendly with Flagler history professor Steve Voguit, who just happened to have a friend heading up one of the largest steel mills in the country and was looking to revive what had become a pretty cobwebbed industry by hiring young professionals to dig up leads.

"They called us 'hunters' and wanted us to focus on business development," Helwig said.

With less than five years under his belt in the field and a great mentor, Helwig's innate ambition didn't take long to show itself.

In 2014, he founded the startup Vested Metals. Helwig explained how the specialty company fills a need across various different markets.

"Used to manufacture everything from the fan blades of a Rolls-Royce airplane engine to the implant prosthesis used in spinal-fusion surgery, we supply titanium, cobalt alloys, copper, brass, bronze and more to industries like aerospace, medical, automotive, industrial and energy," Helwig said. "About 80 to 90 percent of our clients are domestic, but we also supply hard-to-find metals to other countries in our region."

In 2018, Vested Metal had a revenue of over \$2 million with a three-year growth of more than 1,400%, recently landing the company at No. 324 on the prestigious Inc. 5000 List.

Other accolades include being named No. 7 on the Jacksonville Business Journal's 2019 "Fast 50" and Helwig himself recognized as one of the "50 Alumni of Distinction" by Flagler College.

Helwig attributed Vested Metals' steep trajectory of growth to focusing on custom and small orders, learning from mistakes and surrounding himself with a team that's as hungry as he.

"They're wanting to grow, willing to grow," Helwig said.

In an attempt to give back, Helwig serves on Flagler College's alumni board and has hired graduates to his company. He is also a member of the St. Johns County Industrial Development Authority and believes the county is ripe for more business development.

The entrepreneur has plans soon to expand into a larger warehouse and grow into new areas of processing metals on site and hopefully marketing them to other fabricators in Northeast Florida.

"I'd rather stay here than go to Jacksonville and get industrial space on the Southside," Helwig said.

If all goes according to plan, Helwig could double his current workforce of eight over the next year and double the company's revenue at the same time.

"We feel in many ways," Helwig said, "like we're just getting started."