

# Giving Back to God

by Andrew Neltner

**M**anufacturing the tools that simplify all parts of our lives can't be taken for granted. Nor can we take for granted those who make them. Mr. Leonard Miller founded L & M Engineering, a company that manufactures precision mechanisms for the printing and binding industry. He produces the drill bits that make the three holes in binders and looseleaf papers. Without the skills he's applied to his life's work, students and people in business, for example, would have a harder time doing their own work.

Born in 1927, Mr. Miller is the son of Polish immigrants who settled on Chicago's Northwest side. He attended St. Stanislaus Bishop and Martyr grade school. To his father's dismay, he left a Catholic school to attend Washburne Trade School. But dismay turned into pride when the senior Miller saw the projects his son brought home from school. Mr. Miller proved to be a natural in the machine shop.

Following trade school, he served a short stint in the air force. Then he worked at various jobs, mostly in the tool and die business. As a tool and die designer, Mr. Miller's skills started to pay off. "I was one of the highest paid designers in the country," he recalls.

After six years, Mr. Miller's interest in design began to wane. He landed a job with Paul Machine Tool and Die, not as a designer, but as an agent in which he did work on commission for companies that had more business than they could handle.

While there Mr. Miller met his wife Barbara. They dated a few months and married on Christmas Eve, 1964. Two years later their first son Joe was born.

After 12 years with Paul Machine Tool and Die, Mr. Miller again grew restless. He wanted to be on the production end of the business. The solution? Go to work for himself.

In 1970 Mr. Miller founded L & M Engineering Company. Working out of his basement in Willow Springs, Illinois, with Barbara helping with the books, he began what was to become a successful and profitable business.

"I was a self-employed machine shop agent," he says. "I was either a commissioned salesman or machinist." Running a business from his home, he took orders and then farmed them out to various private machine shops.

"I was the estimator. I subcontracted the work out of my home. I was an inspector. I packaged the work. I built it. I handled all the complaints. I guaranteed the work—if it wasn't good enough I had it done all over again," says Mr. Miller.

The first year was hard, he recalls. But with prayer and a little devotion, his efforts paid off and the business began to thrive. That's when he began his relationship with the Jesuits.

Mr. Miller wanted to share his success. He opened a telephone book, located an entry for Catholic Missionary Organizations, and the Jesuits were one of the first of those organizations to benefit from the fruits of Mr. Miller's labor. "The Jesuits are the Lord's soldiers," he says. His generosity continues to this day.

In 1972 Mr. Miller stumbled into the drill business. While handling an order for Rockwell International, someone asked him to examine a drill. Mr. Miller remembers, "He yelled out, 'Len, come over here. Can you fix this drill head?' I looked at it and said, 'Yeah, I can repair it.' I took it home, repaired it and brought it back the next day." But the next day more drill heads needed repairing, and the day after that even more.

Mr. Miller continued to repair drill heads, but was soon short of the parts he needed.



With his wife Barbara, Leonard Miller has turned a small basement-run business into a great success, all the while remembering God's role in his life.

Rockwell then contracted him to also make the parts he needed. He was soon devoting all of his business to Rockwell International.

Anticipating orders, Mr. Miller began to produce the drill parts before he needed them. But after five years, Rockwell sold the drill division to a Canadian company.

When the Canadian company refused to solicit him for business, Mr. Miller decided to manufacture his own drills. Drill Head & Parts Engineering Company, a division of L & M Engineering Company, was born.

Mr. Miller had found his niche. In the following years, business boomed. His company is now the largest manufacturer of heavy duty paper hollow drills in the world.

And with his success, he always remembers the Jesuits. When he sold his home in Willow Springs, Mr. Miller donated funds equivalent to the sale price to the Chicago Province, never forgetting God's hand in his success. These funds are being used to take care of the elderly and infirm at Colombiere, the Jesuit health care community for the Chicago Province.

"It was God's house," he says. "He blessed us and took us up in business in the house and he enriched us in such a way during the 25 years we lived there that I just gave it to the Jesuits. I couldn't see just selling it. It didn't belong to me."

Mr. Miller now lives in Downers Grove, Illinois, and has just finished construction on an industrial complex. His business will be housed in one unit but he plans to rent out seven other units.

The Millers have been happily married for 31 years. In their modest home, they have some time to relax now that Mr. Miller has retired. For the first time in his life, he purchased a new car. In typical fashion, however, he donated both of his used cars to the Jesuits.

Mr. Miller now has a chance to enjoy the blessings God has bestowed upon him. Even so, he still manages to make it into work six days a week.

