

YOUNG WINDOWS SEES CLEAR BENEFITS AFTER SWITCH TO MOBILE, HEIGHT-ADJUSTABLE PRO-LINE WORKSBENCHES

The products constructed by Young Windows, Inc. of Conshohocken, PA are always on the move. The company is a leading manufacturer of custom aluminum windows for specialized on-highway, off-highway, transit and marine vehicles – everything from public buses to heavy-duty excavating equipment. Unlike windows designed for homes and buildings, these commercial windows have to be built to withstand the rigors of constant motion.

Ironically, for a long time, the company’s assembly department was being held back by immobility. This department is where aluminum frames and locks, glass subcomponents and the glass plates themselves are brought together to produce the final window product. Until recently, the technicians responsible for assembling the windows were stationed at - literally - homemade benches that had been cobbled together out of large chunks of wood. They were, according to Young Windows Vice President Joseph Lepo, “The kind of benches you’d work on in your basement at home.”

Lepo continued, “Our old benches were far from user-friendly. And they were extremely immobile. If we wanted to shift a workbench to another part of the department, we needed three men and a forklift to get the job done.”

The move to improving the company's assembly department workbenches was, itself, set in motion around the time that Lepo came to the company in 1997. It was then that the family-run Young Windows decided to improve overall efficiency and productivity by transitioning to a lean manufacturing operation. The company initially focused on improving its machining area, then simplified the movement of materials from department to department, and finally began to upgrade its assembly department in 2002.

The decision to replace the department's antiquated wooden workbenches was a simple one. And after seeing a sample Ergo-Line ergonomic workbench from Pro-Line of Haverhill, MA, that specific purchasing decision was just as simple.

"There were a number of key variables that guided our workbench decision-making process," Lepo explained. "These included flexibility, mobility, ergonomic ease of use, improved lighting, aesthetics and rugged durability. We met with a regional distributor that specialized in this type of workstation, Daneker Electronics, and they showed us a fully assembled Ergo-Line workbench that could meet all our needs.

"We ended up purchasing 15 of these heavy-duty benches, each of which Pro-Line custom configured for our unique needs."

Providing customers with products to fit their unique needs is nothing new for Pro-Line. Founded in 1978, the company has become the recognized leader in ergonomic workbench and assembly workbench design. In fact, Pro-Line is credited with producing one of the first hand-crank, height-adjustable workbenches back in 1987. The heavy duty Ergo-Line workbench that Young Windows purchased adjust from 30" to

42”, have a 330-pound capacity, and are available with a range of different worksurfaces, as well as a range of accessories both above and below the worksurface.

Pro-Line took its traditional Ergo-Line bench and outfitted it for Young Windows with wheel casters for complete mobility. The length of the workbenches was increased from 6 feet to 8 feet, to go with 36-inch deep worksurfaces to accommodate the large window assemblies, some of which are as large as 3 feet high by 6 feet long.

According to Lepo, “We needed proven, durable workbenches that could easily accommodate our window assemblies, which are 20 to 80 pounds fully assembled. The stations needed to be strong and rugged, yet mobile. With our old benches, the employees would ‘roost’ at their workbenches, which would often get cluttered with tools, parts and even personal items. With our new system in place, our people and our workstations can move to where the work needs to get done. Benches can be moved mid-shift without disrupting workflow. And every bench is partnered with a roll-around tool box that helps to free up space and keep essential tools readily accessible.”

Ergonomic concerns were also at the forefront of Young Window’s choice of the height-adjustable Ergo-Line workbenches. The company’s assembly department is home to 23 people over two shifts, with different size and height people switching off on the same bench. Given the large dimensions of the window assemblies, keeping the entire job within easy reach of each person and eliminating potential stress and strain was an essential goal.

Since reducing eye strain was also important to Lepo, each bench came equipped with Pro-Line’s conveniently located lighting accessory. In the previous manufacturing department, overhead lighting was suspended from the ceiling, producing inconsistent

and often ineffective light. The Pro-Line lighting not only casts uniform light, but it is also positioned at a level above the worksurface that makes it extremely unobtrusive.

Other workbench accessories that now bring increased functionality to each Young Windows workstation include a plastic bin rack, a shelf attached to the rear uprights, a power strip and an articulating computer shelf which assembly technicians use primarily as a convenient place to hold paperwork and technical drawings.

For the worksurface, Lepo and his team opted for a forgiving laminate surface that could easily be swept clear of any chips and debris which might damage the glass.

Finally, because the assembly area is often a showplace for customers and potential customers, aesthetic appeal was very important. Young Windows ordered the benches painted in a grey color which matched the rest of the visible furniture and equipment at the facility.

“A uniform look was essential for us to convey a cohesive, high-quality image,” said Lepo. “The new workbenches in the assembly area allow us to maintain a cleaner, neater, more attractive shop, which creates a better corporate image as well as a better work environment for our employees.”

Lepo concluded, “Since we’ve switched to the Pro-Line workbenches, we’ve seen both a clear increase in productivity as well as improved product quality.”

That’s a view that this window manufacturer is very glad to have.

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