

BEL Hall of Fame 2016 Profile

Leon Habegger, *LH Industries*

For Leon Habegger, work was a sequence of experiences that grew organically, one upon the other. Raised on a family farm outside Berne, Indiana, Leon was the third generation to harvest grain, tend livestock, and manage custom baling operations.

When Habegger graduated from high school, he was ready to make his way in the world. A member of his church offered him the opportunity to serve as an apprentice at Thompson Tool & Die. To accept this new challenge, Habegger refused his father's enticing offer of a new John Deere 60 tractor and started his new career.

Because of his strong mechanical aptitude, Habegger learned quickly. His responsibilities increased, and he was soon the company's top grinder. Applying his growing skills, Habegger learned to grind carbide to create a more durable die. Habegger began working to support components of the General Electric's dies when they could not find anyone to help with their overflow.

Responding to the increasing need for expert carbide grinding, in 1966 this born entrepreneur took \$1,000 in savings and refinanced his car for another \$2,500. With the money, he opened his own tool & die business, LH Carbide. Habegger was 29 years old when the company opened in a vacated printing shop in Fort Wayne. It became Habegger's niche; make products that were complicated. The kind of products others could not produce.

Under Habegger's guidance, LH Carbide developed a unique ability to create progressive lamination tooling for industrial automotive, appliance, and electric motor manufacturers. He patented the company's vertical integration process, known across the globe as VeriLok. Today, LH Carbide holds more than 40 United States and worldwide patents.

As the business grew, it began to create even more complex parts for the electric motor industry. Habegger's second company, LH Stamping, includes steel lamination and terminal stamping. It specializes in loose laminations and interlocked electrical steel cores.

As this new company expanded, LH Carbide continued to make dies and sell them to other companies. LH Controls was formed to make controls that allowed these other companies to use the dies with their machines, while also specializing in factory operations.

Habegger's companies were highly successful in meeting the close tolerances required by its customers. This skill in exacting tolerance was key to the formation of LH Medical in 2007 and its expansion in 2010. The company creates the difficult pieces required for surgical instruments and medical implants.

Habegger is active in each business and serves as Chairman of the Board for LH Industries, the holding company. Habegger's son Brad manages LH Stamping. His son Rick is responsible for all company sales operations. Bruce Emerick, Habegger's son-in-law, is president of LH Industries.

Each of Habegger's successful companies maintains his founding principle – giving the customer the best products and service possible at competitive pricing.

A generously philanthropic community leader, Habegger supports his church, Youth For Christ and numerous other organizations. Giving of his time and talents, he has also been active in mission trips overseas. He has made God a 16% silent partner in his medical business which in turn is then gifted back to the community. Habegger makes family, faith and donation a priority.

“When you talk with Leon about success, it's not going to be the story about what he has or the worldly wealth of his businesses. For him, it is about the perfection of each product and process, from a single die to the artistic perfection of an entire car,” says Mike Eikenberry, a close friend.

In addition to continuing to run his world-recognized businesses and giving back to the community, Habegger shares his passion for automobiles. His company Ultra Motorsports restores historic automobiles and prides itself on pairing each customer with their perfect vehicle, whether it's a vintage classic, an exotic dream, or a daily-driven family car.