

Dad's blessing motivates man to branch out

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It took five short years for Corning engineer Clarence Hines to transform an engineering services firm he established for \$10,000 into a flourishing company on track to bring in more than \$1 million this year.

But don't expect Hines, who runs his business from Strathmont Plaza in Elmira, to sit back and count his loot once the barrier is cracked. As he says, after one mountain is climbed, there's always another.

And besides, Hines' motivation comes from something more deeply rooted than financial gain. The source is a talk Hines had with his bedridden father, who was stricken with sarcoidosis and would eventually die from the condition.

"There were a lot of Clarence Hineses in my family," Hines told me as we talked about his family's railroad demolition business that had been passed down through the generations. With him being the next in line, it was a given that he would follow in the footsteps of his namesakes. But the interests of this Clarence Hines lay elsewhere.

As a youngster growing up in New Jersey, Hines developed a knack for repairing items around his house — to the point where his friends would regularly comment on how there was never anything broken in the Hines family home.

He took technical courses in high school and went on to earn an associate degree in computer integrated manufacturing at Camden County College, which was followed by a bachelor's degree in manufacturing engineering technology a Masters in Engineering Management with an area of specialization in Project Management from New Jersey Institute of Technology.

After graduating, he worked for three years as an engineering services contractor, did some freelancing on the side while all the time deflecting the pressure to assume the family business.

Shortly before the elder Hines died in 1999, he called the younger Hines to his bedside and told him that above all, he wanted his son to be

successful. The elder Hines then said he would pass down the business to his son, but also gave his blessing for the son to do his own thing, even if it meant selling the family business.

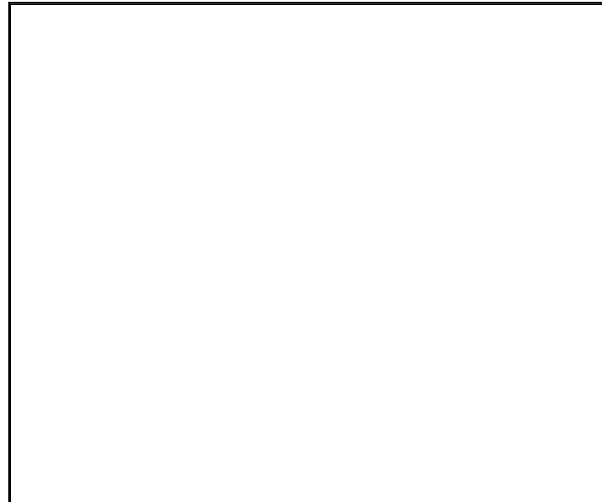
"I promised my father that I'd move in that direction," said Hines. "I had a new fire in my heart."

In 2005, Hines created his company, Controls & Automation Consultants LLC, which designs and installs programmable logic controllers. The devices are the backbone of any automated manufacturing system. For example, we've all seen things like robotic arms busy with production work on an assembly line. A programmable logic controller is the device telling the robotic arms what to do.

Hines was still working for an engineering consulting firm when he started his company. The following year, his employer assigned him to a project at Corning Inc., which led to more local work that he handled through his company. And at the same time, his existing clients from the New Jersey area needed him more and more. He then decided to put all of his energies into his own company.

CAC engineers are working on seven different projects scattered across the Northeast. The firm has also compiled a list of 17 private sector companies, a majority of which are manufacturers and include well-known names like Johnson & Johnson, Lockheed Martin and GE Lighting.

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A new door recently opened for the company when Hines, with the assistance of the Small Business Development Center in Corning, was certified by the state as a minority vendor.

He is currently working to secure sub-contracting deals with three companies that already do business with the state but need a minority-owned company to fill the state's mandate for minority suppliers to participate in state contract work whenever possible.

One of the deals, Hines said, has the potential to double his company's current income, reported at about \$990,000 last year.

At the Small Business Association's annual awards luncheon held in Syracuse earlier this month, Hines's company received the Excellence in Small Business Award, which he said was a major step toward the excellence he's trying to achieve with his business. He also said it represented a sense of accomplishment for the Hines family — especially when one considers the source of his inspiration.

While Hines pushes his company toward more successes, he also finds time to give back to Camden County College as a guest lecturer. He is also financially supporting the development of an on-campus engineering lab, which is being named after him, that will provide work stations for 20 students.

The reason for his decision to help one of his alma maters?

"God has blessed me," he said. "But you should never forget where you came from because it makes you who you are."

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Clarence Hines, President and CEO of Controls & Automation Consultants (CAC), holds a 2010 small business award that recognized his company. (JEFF RICHARDS/Staff Photo)

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