

#### 5 QUESTIONS FOR AFZAAL MIR:

CTE Managing Editor Greg Bartlett spoke with Afzaal Mir, founder and owner of toolmaker FSC Cutting Tools Technology LLC, in Greenville, SC about his business and life.



**Afzaal Mir**

**Cutting Tool Engineering:** What led you in 2006 to form your company?

**Mir:** I had been at a small company, a cutting tools manufacturer, for 26 years. The guy who hired me started me in QC. I had done technical drawings in college by hand but had no clue about tools or anything. He moved me up rapidly, and I worked hard from 6 a.m. to 8 p.m. every day. I wanted to learn. It challenged me. My boss told me he was going to sell me his company someday, but he just wasn't ready to sell yet. By 2006, I thought, "That's long enough to wait." We were both getting older, and I wanted to start my own company by that point. No hard feelings.

**CTE:** How was FSC Cutting Tools Technology able to experience rapid growth from the start?

**Mir:** In July 2007, I bought a 60,000-sq.-ft. building on 4 acres. If I had waited longer, I would never have purchased it, because of the financial crisis. That was God helping me out, I guess. I had been renting a 1,500-sq.-ft. space before that for me and my wife; we had no employees and no customers at first. By the end of our second year in business, we had 15 employees. I had so much room with the new building; I didn't know what to do with it. If I had been in a smaller, 5,000-sq.-ft. building and grew the way I grew, the size would have stopped me from doing what I wanted. FSC consumes about 25,000 sq. ft. today, and other businesses that I own occupy the rest of the space. Once I bring in a planned machine shop, the building will be completely occupied. But in 2007, when I started FSC, aerospace companies gave so much work to me. From my years working with aerospace, I knew a lot of people, and they trusted me. That was a big factor.

**CTE:** How did you get into manufacturing in the U.S. after you began your career as a pilot in Pakistan?

**Mir:** I came to the U.S. and was flying planes out of New York. My cousin, an electrical engineer, lived in Greenville and persuaded me to move there. It's a very beautiful town. I wasn't making enough money flying charter, so I just figured I'd work somewhere while I waited on Delta or somebody to hire me full time. I just happened to apply at a cutting tool manufacturer, right next to the airport, where I drove by every day. I still consider myself a pilot and fly a little on weekends for myself. That's why I do so much aerospace work.

**CTE:** What is next for FSC Cutting Tools Technology?

**Mir:** Our revenue grew 32 percent last year. It was our biggest revenue ever. We have 35 employees, and I've automated in recent years. I'm actively looking to purchase another cutting tool company that also has a machine shop, if I can find one. That will make me more self-reliant. When I get one challenge done, I want to go to the next one. It's not about money after a while.

**CTE:** What is next for you personally?

**Mir:** To me, everything is about creating jobs. Every business I run is about creating jobs. There's no better service that you can do for your country than that. I truly believe that. I'm not a unique person. America has been full of people like me for the past 200 years. I owe a lot to where I live. If we didn't have immigrants in large numbers, we wouldn't be so well off.