

C & S FASTENERS

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BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS SINCE 2004 - BACKED BY THE BUSINESS EDGE™ by Dennis Cowhey, President, Computer Insights

A Company Built On Relationships

Building Relationships Since 2004 — those words capture what C & S Fasteners has been about from the beginning. They're more than a slogan. They describe the way business is done every day — on the phones each morning, at the counter each afternoon, and in the warehouse each evening as the last orders head out the door.

C & S Fasteners was founded in Tampa in 2004 by Mel Laing, his wife, Evie Laing, and Paul Ratkovich. The name “C & S” stands for Coated and Stainless, reflecting the specialty products that were at the heart of the business from the beginning and remain a signature strength today.

Mel had spent his career in the fastener industry. Originally from Pittsburgh, he spent a short time in New York before the family moved to Florida for the warmer weather. When the time came to build something of his own, he opened C & S with Evie and Paul. Many of his former customers followed him, not because of the name on the door, but because they trusted Mel and wanted to continue doing business with him.

A Legacy Built By Mel

To understand C & S Fasteners, you have to understand Mel Laing. By every account, he was a rare kind of business owner — someone who saw the company not simply as a business, but as an opportunity to make people's lives better. That included customers, employees, competitors, and the community around him.

“He was always looking for ways to help people,” his daughter, Mindy Laing, recalls. “His goal was to give everyone a chance — to provide people with an



opportunity to work here, change their lives, and build something better. He believed in sharing what he had with others and giving back whenever he could.”

That instinct showed up everywhere. Long-time customers remember the same qualities:

“One of the biggest things I remember about Mel was that he was always looking to bring business together — whether it was a new customer or a competitor. He always left the door open for you. He was friendly and went out of his way to make you feel like you were the only person in the room when he was talking to you.”

— **Mark Gentry, long-time C & S Fasteners customer**

“Mel was very knowledgeable and always ready to help. Whenever there was an issue, Mel was there with answers, or got answers quickly. He always cared about his employees and others he worked with. Kind, generous, knowledgeable, caring.”

— **Tammy Robinson, long-time C & S Fasteners customer**

“We build lasting business success by putting meaningful human relationships first”

— **MINDY LAING, OWNER**

Around the office and warehouse, that same generosity was evident. “All the girls here he considered his daughters,” Mindy says. “All of them. If you needed something personally, you went to him — and if he could help, he would.”

Employees’ children were treated like grandchildren. He supported local schools, Little League teams, and community causes, believing the business was more than a place to make a living — it was an opportunity to make a difference in the lives of the people around him.

Mel died in 2022, during a time when the family was preparing for a Florida hurricane while still navigating the lingering effects of the pandemic. His absence is felt every day at C & S, but his values and standards continue to shape the business and the people who carry on his legacy.

Carrying The Standard Forward

Mindy Laing didn’t set out to run a fastener company. She earned a degree in psychology and spent seven years as a special education teacher before joining C & S twelve years ago. What began as a temporary role, stepping in to help while an employee was away, turned into something much more permanent. She stayed, grew into the business, and eventually took on a larger leadership role. Since Mel’s death in 2022, Mindy has led C & S as Owner.

She hasn’t done it alone. Mel had a gift for bringing the right people into the business at the right time, and several of the team members he hired in the years before his death became exactly the people C & S needed to carry the company forward. For Mindy, it’s hard not to believe there was a greater plan at work — one that placed the right people in the right roles when they were needed most.



Jason Adams joined C & S as Product Manager in 2017 and today plays a key role in the company’s product development and technology decisions. “Jason has done an exceptional job developing our comprehensive product line,” Mindy says, “successfully bridging the gap between everyday essentials and highly specialized, hard-to-find items.”

The outside sales personnel bring decades of experience in the fastener industry — the kind of knowledge that, as Mindy puts it, is becoming harder to find. Together with the purchasing, inside sales, and warehouse team, they share the values Mel built C & S on and have grown together through some of the industry’s most challenging years, continuing to carry those values forward.

What C & S Fasteners Does

From its 15,000-square-foot facility in Apollo Beach, C & S Fasteners stocks approximately 4,000 SKUs and serves customers nationwide. The product line covers bolts, nuts, washers, anchors, and specialty items, with a particular depth in large-diameter concrete anchors up to 12 inches long and self-drill screws up to 8 inches long.

Materials include 304, 316, and 410 stainless, brass, nylon, plain steel, and galvanized finishes in Grades 2, 5, and 8. Standard sizes run from 1/4” to 3” diameter for bolts and #8 to #14 for smaller fasteners; metric coverage runs from 4mm to 36mm.

What C & S is best known for, however, is the specialty work: coated and painted fasteners in steel and stainless — including Xylan and customer-specific paint colors — non-standard fasteners, and custom kits packaged with the customer's own labels. Value-added services include kitting, vendor-managed inventory, custom orders, plating, and custom-labeled packaging.

The customer base is a mix of OEMs, construction contractors, contracted MROs, and resellers. Since the move to Apollo Beach, the marine and industrial segments have grown particularly important — including rigging crews who work the Gulf Coast for months at a time and specialty railing customers who source nationally from C & S because of the coated and painted product depth.

A Philosophy Of Sustainable Growth

Ask Mindy about growth plans, and Mel's philosophy comes through clearly. "You never want to grow faster than you can continue to care for your existing customers," she says. "Because if you do, you risk losing your new customers and your old customers, too."

At a fastener industry show in 2017, an industry colleague asked Mel if C & S had multiple locations — a question that led to a response Mindy still remembers. "Just one," Mel answered. The reply came back: More locations, more people, more problems.

The philosophy stuck. "I'd rather grow here with our customers and help them grow," Mindy says. "When they grow, we grow too."

For Mindy, that philosophy still guides the company today. After four years as Owner, she knows there is still plenty to learn and room to grow — not just for herself, but for C & S as well. She is focused on building on what Mel created while making thoughtful changes that reflect her own vision for the company, with the guidance and input of the team around her.

She points to a small example that captures how the company thinks: C & S has sent customers warehouse-rack labels that match the labels C & S uses internally, so the customer's part numbers line up with what they're receiving. Little things. Continuous things. The kind of things a distributor only bothers with when it genuinely wants a relationship to last decades.



A New Foundation: The Business Edge™

By 2023, C & S Fasteners had outgrown the accounting-first system it had used for years. It worked well as a general ledger, but as the company's blanket-order business, tariff exposure, and pricing complexity grew, its limits became increasingly costly.

"It wasn't an inventory system," Mindy explains. "It was more of an accounting system, and it just wasn't accounting for our inventory right." Blanket orders could be oversold. Reserved lots weren't truly reserved. Tariffs didn't roll into pricing automatically. Customer-specific pricing structures weren't possible.

Jason had been watching The Business Edge™ by Computer Insights Inc. at fastener industry shows for some time, and eventually the case for change was decisive. "He kept going to the shows and seeing it and was like, we need to change," Mindy says. "And finally we got down and started doing the nitpicking of the inventory, and got it up and going."

The impact has been immediate. Automatic customer-specific price structures — impossible in the previous system — now surface the right pricing the moment an order is entered, whether the customer buys broken boxes, cartons, or full pallets. C & S can incentivize bulk purchases without manual pricing gymnastics. When one reseller customer was buying 30 bags out of 50-bag boxes and forcing warehouse labor to break each box, C & S set up a special full-box price structure.

The customer takes the whole box now, the warehouse saves time, and the savings pass through to the customer. Jason describes the operational change in plain terms:

“The Business Edge™ has made a lot of the basic functions we have to do easier, and allowed us to simplify processes that were difficult. It made them so they’re not a headache anymore. We had a lot of things before that were eight or ten steps in the process, and now they’re one quick flow — done. Especially for things like secondary processing of materials, which we do a fair amount of. Before, everybody turned around and looked at me to do it, because I’d figured out the workarounds. Now, anybody can do it. It’s simple, straightforward, easy.”

— **Jason Adams, Product Manager @ C & S Fasteners**

The historical view has proven equally valuable. The years 2021 through 2023 delivered COVID, two Florida hurricanes in three weeks, and a cascade of tariff changes — data patterns that make recent history essentially unusable for trend analysis. When C & S implemented The Business Edge™, the team brought ten years of sales history forward so they could compare current customer activity against pre-disruption baselines from 2017, 2018, and 2019.

Mindy credits Diane and Rachel at Computer Insights for their guidance and support throughout the process, while Jason took the lead on much of the implementation work. “Everyone we’ve reached out to has been extremely helpful,” she says.

Looking Ahead

Since moving to its Apollo Beach location, C & S Fasteners has been laying the groundwork for continued growth. The company is currently restructuring the warehouse — foundational work made possible by an ERP system that finally provides the support needed to do it right. With a strong presence in the region’s marine and industrial markets, the focus isn’t simply on chasing volume. It’s on strengthening relationships with long-time customers while building new relationships that can last for years to come.

“It’s important to me that every customer feels valued and treated as an individual,” Mindy says. “I want my



employees to feel the same way. It’s taken a long time to build a team of people who share the same values we do, and I’m really proud of the people we have here. I value their families, too, and I respect that everyone has different personal needs and responsibilities outside of work. We’re all different, and I want to be understanding of that. When people know they’re valued and respected, they give that same care to our customers. Not every customer is the same, and not every customer needs the same thing. We’re here to ask, ‘What can we do to better serve you?’”

Mel would recognize the company he built. Building Relationships Since 2004 still captures what C & S stands for. The values are the same. The commitment to customers is the same. The people answering the phones and working in the warehouse are carrying forward the culture he created. What has changed is the toolkit — and the next generation carrying the company forward.

More Information

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