
From steel mill to executive suite

By Hannah Hepfer



'We build America every day'

Tracy Porter knows a thing or two about climbing the corporate ladder. As a teenager, he spent his summers maintaining the yard at a steel mill in Seguin where his mother worked. Next, he advanced to the melt shop, rolling mill, and fabrication department, all while putting himself through Texas State University.

He kept a busy schedule, attending school three days a week and working the other four, but his industriousness didn't go unnoticed. "They saw my work ethic," he recalls of the mill's leadership.

Porter (B.B.A. '79) now oversees that same mill — and six others — as executive vice president of CMC Operations for Commercial Metals Company (CMC), one of the country's largest steel manufacturers and metal recyclers with facilities in the United States and Europe. After graduating with a degree in accounting, he worked for a handful of other companies over the next 10 years before returning to CMC — a welcome reunion. "It just felt like home," he says of the 102-year-old company, where he's been since 1991.

Porter supervises the company's six operating vice presidents and is responsible for operational activities in the United States and Poland, including making and selling products, driving efficiency, and maintaining competitiveness. He is also involved in mergers and acquisitions.

The company culture at CMC is a primary reason he has stayed. "We try to maintain an atmosphere where everyone feels they are a part of something worthwhile and that we value their contributions.

"When you feel good about where you work, you work hard," says Porter, who is also chairman of the Steel Manufacturers Association. "You naturally want to be successful and associate with a winner."

He says the tangible and necessary qualities of steel appeal to him and that he feels a sense of patriotism knowing the efforts of CMC employees can be seen in skylines and on highways. "I like the fact that we make things. I like to say, 'We build America every day.' It's a sense of pride for myself and our employees that we can look at countless structures around the United States, including the Frost Tower in downtown Austin, and know that our steel is in that building."

As Porter remembers his days at Texas State, he recalls his first time on campus and thinking, "It feels good here." Today he says, "It was close, affordable, and flexible in that it allowed me to both work and go to school." His son Justin (B.S. 2008), is also a Bobcat.

Emphasizing that he believes Texas State has come a long way, Porter cites the university's direction as a good one and "we want to be part of that." To that end, he and his wife, Kelly, recently created an endowed scholarship for the McCoy College of Business Administration students. "There are a lot of young people with ambition and talent that are denied opportunity because of economic reasons," he says.

CMC is also a strong supporter of the engineering technology program as it connects with their Central Texas facilities in Seguin, San Antonio, San Marcos, Austin, and Buda.

People often ask Porter for career advice and he cites treating everyone with respect as critical to his success. "I've been a people person all my life," he says. "My belief is that without people, there really isn't any business to be done," he says.

He also advises young professionals to focus on their long-term goals, but not to rush their journey. "There were times I wanted a promotion but realized later that if I'd gotten it, I would've most likely failed because I didn't have the experience or knowledge."

He encourages those who are frustrated with their progress to keep a balanced perspective as they engage in their chosen fields. "Do the job you're given with enthusiasm," he says. "Bring dignity to the work. Leadership in good companies know who is getting work done so don't get caught up in the politics."

Porter assures them that a strong work ethic and the ability to get along with people will ultimately be rewarded. "The harder I work, the luckier I get," he muses. "I think that's a little bit of life's story."
