

## COLUMBIA ELEVATOR EXPANDS TO SOUTHERN REGION

by Ralph M. Newman



Columbia Southern, Inc. (CSI) cabs plant, Miami, Florida



Columbia Northern Corp. entrances plant, Port Chester, New York



Columbia Elevator Products Co., Inc. corporate headquarters

In announcing his company's expansion to a new plant in the southeastern U.S., Louis "LJ" Blaiotta, Jr., president of Columbia Elevator Products Co., Inc., stated, "The elevator business is booming!" Columbia, which was founded in the mid 1960s, has acquired an additional 55,000 square feet in Miami, bringing the company's aggregate operational footage to 120,000 square feet.

Blaiotta added:

*We certainly have seen some 'ups & downs' during our 40-year history, but these past couple of years have been wonderful for our industry. The next few years look equally as positive. I'm thinking it has to do with low interest rates, the general trends in construction today, plus the general maturation of the architectural products industry and its associated shakeouts and consolidations. Whatever the cause, the environment is driving us to meet and exceed the demands of our present and prospective customer base. It is imperative that we remain ahead of the curve.*

For the past four decades, Columbia has been manufacturing and distributing elevator cabs, entrances and architectural parts at its Port Chester, New York headquarters, with an emphasis on quick turnaround and reliable lead times.

"To maintain our delivery reputation, certain steps became necessary," added Blaiotta. "First, we went to a double shift, but that benefited us for only so long. As demand continued to grow, we had sufficient work to require four shifts, which we couldn't accommodate at our existing facility. The only possibilities were to move to a larger space or open a second location. For several reasons, we chose the latter."

Columbia's expansion has led to the formation of a new organizational structure. If the customer's needs are for designs, drawings, answers to safety and code compliance questions, these are handled by Columbia Elevator Products, where the company's marketing, sales, engineering and distribution functions are headquartered. A principal objective in having two locations was to allow each plant to specialize in its own discipline. Entrances are produced at Columbia Northern Corp., and Columbia Southern Inc. produces cabs. A distribution center ties it all together.

Blaiotta explained the following:

*The decision to produce entrances at Columbia Northern was easy. In Port Chester, we have longstanding experience in creating entrances, plus a major investment in conveyor systems, flexible manufacturing systems, punch presses, bending and roll-forming equipment, gang welding*

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## SUPPLIER SPOTLIGHT

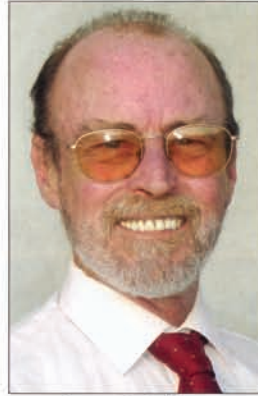
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Louis "LJ" Blaiotta,  
Columbia president



Bob Rosenberg,  
CSI Chief Engineer



Bruce Creighton,  
CSI Purchasing manager



Lou Blaiotta, Sr.,  
Columbia founder & CEO

systems and all other required sheet-metal fabrication capabilities. At the same time, making cabs in Miami is proving really advantageous for us and for our customers. We've brought in highly experienced talent from Florida to produce fancier high-design cabs on top of the standard commodity units that have been our bread and butter. This includes Bob Rosenberg, the southern plant's chief engineer, who worked previously for Brice Southern, and Bruce Creighton, Production Control and Purchasing manager, who worked for Unitech.

Critical to this initiative was a logistic distribution strategy, implemented via the recent opening of a shipping facility near corporate headquarters in Port Chester. The Columbia Logistic Distribution Center coordinates the timing of customer shipments and offers numerous other significant advantages.


Blaiotta continued:

*For instance, if it is convenient for the customer, we can store the work for as long as needed, in an insured, climate-controlled environment. If, on the other hand,*

*the work is needed quickly, the center's staff researches the best carriers and rates for the particular shipment and gets it on the road in 48 hours or less. Or, our customers can send their own trucks and we quickly and easily fork-lift their orders directly from one of our six loading docks.*

One of those most amazed by Columbia's recent growth is Lou Blaiotta, Sr. (Columbia's founder and CEO, and LJ Blaiotta's dad). "Honestly, at first I was worried about how this would go," he recalled. "But, it is wonderful to see how fast this second facility has come on line. It took this company over 30 years to reach a certain level, and now it has doubled – twice – in a very short period of time."

"We are not trying to be everything to everybody, but rather to focus clearly on what we do well," concluded LJ Blaiotta. "Instead of the shotgun approach, it's the silver bullet!"

The new facility, Columbia Southern Inc., is located at 7525 NW 37th Avenue, Miami, Florida 33147. Contact at toll free: (877) 265-3538; and websites: [www.columbia-elevator.com](http://www.columbia-elevator.com) and [www.csi-elevator.com](http://www.csi-elevator.com). 



Columbia Logistical Distribution Center, New York



Storage in an insured, climate-controlled environment