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## Family biz adds staffing to original 'problem solving' mission



More than four decades after being launched by an aeronautical engineer with a knack for problem solving, **Engineering Laboratories Inc.** (more commonly called ELI) has established itself as a staffing company. But with a twist.

The firm's approach to staffing includes more than just providing bodies. ELI offers what it calls a "bundled services" approach, in which it takes full responsibility for getting a job done. It's something **Gordon Meldrum** (pictured), president, wants to do even more of -- especially in specialized areas that include environmental services.

Meldrum says the concept is driven both by customer demand and economic reality.

"Bundled services is an option our customers were requesting," he said. "It allows us to take on full responsibility for a project, so our customers can focus on other areas of their business. We also recognize that traditional staffing projects are not as plentiful as in the past. This option strengthens ELI's competitive advantage in the marketplace."

For ELI, the shift into staffing occurred when Meldrum's late father, Charles, began parlaying the engineering work he was doing for its oldest client, **General Motors Corp.** into project work that required on-site technical help.

"We've always been very good at finding the right person for the right job," says Gordon Meldrum.

One recent example of the kinds of services ELI now offers is a job it did for GM. When the automaker needed a solution to remediate one of its now-closed plants on Eckles Road in Livonia, ELI designed, built and ran the equipment to complete the work.

ELI's services also include providing staff for engineering and architectural firms and filling IT-related jobs.

With some 65 staffers on the payroll (five of whom work in the firm's office), ELI has annual billings of between \$8 million and \$9 million. **Carolyn Meldrum**, Gordon's mother, owns the privately held company.

A mechanical engineer himself, Gordon Meldrum took over as president when his father died in 2005. He says the firm's current is a natural evolution from his Charles Meldrum's "solve the problem" style of doing business.

"(Charles Meldrum) had a lot of crazy things going on," says Gordon, clearly his affection coming through. "He solved problems for manufacturing Vlasic pickles, worked on antennae for part of the NASA space program and a number of think-tank type of operations. By the time he died he had about a dozen patents in his name."

Besides the engineering and staffing services, ELI owns a small ice boat company, **Sarns Hardware**, a legacy from days when the Meldrums owned a metal shop, long since downsized. Sarns Hardware ([www.sarnshardware.com](http://www.sarnshardware.com)) makes rigging and hardware for "hardwater sailing."

-- By **J.D. Booth**

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