



IRA DONOVAN

A MASTER OF METTLE

As the son of an active-duty U.S. Army master sergeant, Ira Donovan lived in nine different cities by the time he was in high school.

"You learn to adapt very quickly," Donovan says. "And to communicate with anyone. It helps that no matter what part of the country people are from, I've usually lived there or somewhere close by."

In five years at Burns & McDonnell, Donovan has moved from staff to senior chemist, to metal finishing specialist to project manager. He works on process design, coordinates with clients, and oversees the work of engineers and construction professionals on projects such as the recent \$13 million-plus renovation of the metal finishing facility at Tinker Air Force Base.

He also stays up on technological advances, new materials, and evolving health and environmental regulations. The metal finishing field doesn't stand still for long, but neither does Donovan.

"He's one of those people who doesn't sleep a lot," says Donovan's boss, facilities department manager Bob Hoisington. "I don't think he sleeps more than 3-4 hours a night. He spends a lot of his own time outside the office reading and researching things online to continually improve his knowledge."

Practical Application

Donovan majored in chemistry because, as he says with a shrug, "It was easy. It just made sense."

While he was at it, he double-majored, in math. He's one of the few people in the country who is certified by the American Electroplaters and Surface Finishers Society as a master surface finisher.

He's familiar with scores of materials and methods used in plating, painting, stripping, polishing or otherwise preparing and coating surfaces — and in managing the health and environmental hazards each may pose.

Donovan's expertise extends to wastewater treatment systems for manufacturing facilities and to Lean Manufacturing and Six Sigma concepts in process design.

"I never wanted to be a guy staring at test tubes in a lab," he says. "Metal finishing involves chemistry, but it's always something different."

Minding the Details

Lately, Donovan has been spending time in Texas, where projects for Bell Helicopter employ multiple processes: phosphoric acid anodizing, titanium pickling, stainless steel etching and plating with cadmium, copper, nickel and silver, plus numerous procedures such as conversion coating, black oxide, magnesium treatment, vapor degreasing, vacuum impregnation and others. Each step, and the timing and sequencing, must be perfect.

Taking care of details as a project manager comes naturally to him. As the oldest of nine siblings, he helped shepherd the family from place to place and kept order in the house while his father was miles away in a combat

zone. His manner is calm and alert, and he's learned how to lead without forcing issues. "You can take a stick to your brother, but you can't take a stick to a client," he jokes.

Still on the Move

Donovan regularly travels across the country to troubleshoot at clients' facilities, or to analyze their systems for proposed expansion or improvements.

Hoisington often travels to project sites with him, most recently to Mexico, where the two toured a client's facility. Donovan rapidly analyzed the processes, taking notes as he walked.

"He's very high-energy," says Hoisington. "He's also a very technical guy. It's awesome to be able to have that depth of expertise when you talk to a client. If you want something done, there's no question that it will be, with Ira on the job."



Metal finishing expert Donovan and Burns & McDonnell project manager Craig Koenig perform a charrette analysis.