



# Direct Impact

**Taking on various roles Mississippi-based Hopkins Advantage helps clients across the automotive industry focus on productivity**

TEXT BY: CARA D. CLARK / PHOTO BY: AMILE WILSON

Whether an OEM or a supplier, a company's core business needs to be the focus of the entire enterprise. The last things automotive companies need to worry about are side issues - if the air conditioning is on the fritz, the copier needs new toner, or the trash cans need emptying.

That's where Hopkins Advantage comes in. Specializing on providing a variety of services to the manufacturing

industry, the company occupies an unusual place in the automotive supply chain. It's also one of those rarities in the industry, a certified Women's Business Enterprise (WBE) and Woman-Owned Small Business (WOSB).

Kelly and Marty Hopkins, co-owners, run the company, which developed from their work together owning a construction company in 2012.

"We started performing small services for business in the area - a little facility maintenance and housekeeping - and the services we provided began to expand," Kelly Hopkins says. "We grew from there. In our first year of starting this, we grew to more than 200 employees in four states, providing services for OEMs and Tier Ones. In 2014, we formed Hopkins Advantage."

The company's growth was largely due to word of mouth. When Hopkins went to work for a facility in Mississippi, often those businesses had operations in other states where they wanted the same caliber of services. Soon, Hopkins had clients in Tennessee, Alabama and Georgia, simply from expanding into the larger organizations of facilities they served locally.

Automotive was a natural fit for Marty Hopkins, who spent more

than 20 years in facility services in the automotive industry. Those were relationship-building decades, creating connections with manufacturers such as Nissan, Kia and Honda.

Kelly Hopkins's background in property management has taught her to bring together disparate elements and ensure they run smoothly.

"The automotive industry is a special group of people to say the least," Kelly Hopkins says. "We're appreciative of the opportunities that have been opened up to us as a women-owned business, and the auto industry is good about that. I love this business because it's fast-paced and ever-changing. You may buy a new car in 2018, and it may look like one from the previous year, but it's probably not the same. Technology is always going faster than anyone can keep up with. It's an exciting time to be in this industry."

The company specializes in rack wash and repair, storeroom and inventory management, preventive maintenance programs and maintenance of mechanical systems and industrial systems. Over time the Hopkinses recognized other needs, including access control and parking lot management and janitorial services and grounds maintenance. These days, it's a "you name it, they do it" attitude that keeps them poised for future expansion.

Marty Hopkins is vice president of the board of directors of the Mississippi Automotive Manufacturers Association, giving him a chance to network, and an opportunity to see the future of automotive in the state firsthand.

"It's a good network of people, and I'm able to see a need for services to provide in the auto industry," Marty Hopkins says. "There's really not anybody else doing what we do. We supply indirect labor whether you are an OEM or a Tier 1 supplier. Instead of hiring five different contractors for five different roles, we go in and take over, allowing you to deal with just one contractor. The advantage is that we have the power to pull people for

different roles and different resources. It's a big thing to our clients to deal with only one person."

The Hopkinses do not want to be categorized as a temp service. They're in it for the long haul, which Kelly Hopkins says is the most benefit for the companies they serve.

"When we manage a process completely, like recycling for instance, you no longer have to worry about that work," Kelly Hopkins says. "We can handle anything that doesn't deal with the production of the car. We take shipping racks, marshal those, load them off, separate them and peel the labels. We handle anything in the process."

Along with building a reliable workforce, Kelly Hopkins says it's a hands-on approach that contributes to the company's success, though it often takes the couple on the road in different directions.

"Marty will be in Georgia, and I'm in Tennessee, and then we may cross paths in Alabama," Kelly Hopkins says. "We stay on the road a good bit to be sure we are taking care of our clients by talking to onsite management and making sure our teams are accomplishing what we are there to do."

Marty Hopkins says those visits to warehouses and plants throughout the Southeast are essential, not only to meet with managers, but to find out if there are other areas for the company to step into, allowing the client to focus on maximum productivity.

"Sometimes when we are on site, we see ways that we can add services and talk to the managers about that," he says. "We may find that what we do for one client in Mississippi might need to be handled differently in Tennessee or

that they need additional services. By being on site, we can see how we can help them do what they are able to do and keep their focus on building the best product."

Through indirect labor, Marty Hopkins says their company not only helps the clients save money, but also might catch some tasks that need to be done that can slip through the cracks in a busy workplace.

"They're busy trying to get a car part out the door," he explains. "We are able to perform jobs with less labor structure cost-wise. If they are paying a trained technician on the floor \$16 an hour, we may be paying our people \$14 and structuring value-added jobs. The jobs that we handle for them are always cost-saving."

An example where costs can be cut is rack marshaling with multiple sizes and configurations of racks making their way from one producer to the next for use in automotive. When OEMs return racks to suppliers, the maintenance is straightforward, but time consuming. Hopkins Advantage examines the rack for damages, repairs it if necessary, sorts it according to size and usage, and returns it to service to begin the process over again.

"Through the indirect process of that part, we can structure the labor a little cheaper, which means instant savings for the client," Marty Hopkins says. "There is a need for that in so many businesses. We're looking to grow not only in automotive, but in other industries as well, and that's a matter of getting the word out and letting people know who we are and educating them on the benefit of partnering with us. We can help a lot of people." ■

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