



Werts Welding celebrates 60 years of being family-owned and staying local

by Madelaine Gerard, Staff Writer
March 14 2017 10:38 AM



WOOD RIVER - With six decades of experience, eight locations across the country and more than 80 employees, Werts Welding and Tank Service still calls Wood River, Illinois home.

Owner Dwight Werts said Wood River would always be home, because that is where the business began when his father (Robert Werts) started it in 1957. Actually, Werts said it began in his father's basement in a farmhouse in Edwardsville before moving to the garage. It moved to Wood River when Helmkamp Construction requested repairs on their construction equipment. Within that first decade, however, Werts said Werts Welding and Tank Service found its true calling and specialization - oil tankers.

"In the early 1960s, a company had one of its transports damaged, and my father was asked to weld a new bottom," Werts said. "The material was aluminum, which was something of a new metal being used at the time."

Through additional work on welding aluminum, specifically on oil tankers, Werts Welding became specialized on their repair, which was fortunate given the amount of oil refineries and pipelines in the area around Wood River.

"It was natural, since we had so many tanker trucks, we needed someone to fix them," Werts said.

Soon, Werts Welding and Tank Service started buying and stocking tanker and trailer parts for repairs. Eventually, they began selling those parts over the counter.

When Werts took the company from his father, he said he wanted to grow it and expand it. He said his father was supportive of that move.



"Family businesses are interesting," he said. "There are good days and bad days, but you learn to work together. My dad was my biggest supporter. When I got the business, I wanted to grow the business. He gave me 100 percent of his support. He said, 'if you want to make it better, make it better.'"

In 1991, Werts took over a San Antonio Company. In 1997 he purchased a company with branches across the Southeastern United States, including Tampa, Florida, Birmingham, Alabama and Atlanta, Georgia. He also has locations in Des Moines, Iowa, Billings, Montana and Denver, Colorado. In all, Werts now has eight locations with as many as 80 employees, and he no longer only specializes in repairing trailers, he also sells them.



"We're kind of like a car dealership," he said. "We sell new and used trailers, we do repairs, we sell parts and we have a lease fleet. We're no different than a Cadillac or Chevy dealer, except they sell the cars and we sell the trailers."

Currently, Werts sells Heil Trailers, which has been in business for over a century, but also sells parts and trailers from more than 40 other manufacturers. He said Heil does not provide transport trailers for all of the things his customers require. He said some of his customers need oil tanker trailers as well as trailers for anhydrous ammonia, the latter of which Heil may not provide.

To survive the constant fluctuations in oil supply and demand, Werts said his business has survived and remained steady due to diversification. Besides oil and anhydrous ammonia, Werts said trailers he sells transport concrete, plastic and all sorts of materials.

Even with that diversification, Werts said his business would most likely be struggling if it was solely based in Wood River. He said most of his customers in the State of Illinois are not from the Riverbend. He said many come from Southern Illinois and Southern Missouri, saying he was more likely to receive business from Alton, Missouri than Alton, Illinois. He said locations often fluctuate, adding when one does well another may be struggling, but that could easily change within short time.

"Our facilities in Florida are doing well," he said. "But in Montana where oil is big, they're struggling a bit right now. When one picks up, it usually picks up enough where another may have dropped off."

While the business may have highs and lows, it remains steady and loyal to its employees. Werts said the average tenure at his business is just below 12 years, which is unheard of in today's corporate culture.

"Even though we are eight locations and constantly add people and have retirements, our average tenure is just below 12 years," Werts said. "There's not a lot of turnover. They come here to work and they stay. That is very rare these days. We have a lot of 25-30 years service employees."

Werts said those employees "humble him," saying when he sees them gathered, he realizes each one of them has a family and a life dependent on the success of his business. He said seeing all of the employees just within the Wood River branch humbles him and makes him feel responsible.

Those employees are also grateful for Werts and have come together on many occasions to support him. Last Christmas, Werts said he was working towards helping a homeless family have a good Christmas, utilizing his own time and resources to do so. He said he did not tell any of his employees about what he was doing, but said they somehow "got word of it."

"When I came into the office the Monday before Christmas, I found the office full of canned goods, groceries and gifts for the family," he said. "I had not asked anybody or told anyone about what I was doing, but somehow word got out. Word got to all those branches, and they all worked to help the family. We were able to give that family a good Christmas, because our employees cared about them."

[Cory Davenport also contributed to this story.](#)