



Wisconsin Family Business of the Year Award

WINNERS

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BASSETT MECHANICAL

Grand Award Winner

Large company category

The nomination starts out "Like most everything we do here, this nomination is the result of many people working together".

The company provides mechanical contracting and metal fabrication from offices in Kaukauna, Madison and Milwaukee. Bassett Mechanical, headquartered in Kaukauna might make foundation components for a windmill in the energy industry one day and make a hyperbaric chamber used in deep sea dive systems the next.

Started in 1936 by E. W. "Al" Bassett as Manufacturers Service Company in Appleton, they serviced home refrigerators and light commercial units. Al's brother Charlie joined him in 1945 when the company was known as Bassett Refrigeration Company. In 1974, company leadership transitioned to the second generation when Charlie's son, Bill Bassett became president of the newly renamed Bassett, Inc.

Over the years, Bassett Mechanical has expanded their breadth of services and processes including HVAC, custom metal fabricating, plumbing and piping, laser cutting, and testing and balancing. Bassett was the first mechanical contractor to become ISO 9001:2000 certified.

Another way family is linked with the business is the number of other families who work there. There are fathers, sons, daughters, husbands, wives, nephews, uncles and brothers working side by side.

The company provides employees with a long menu of benefits including Employee Assistance Program, annual health screening and hearing tests, reimbursement of health club fees and eye care expenses, Weight Watchers meetings on site, long-term health care insurance, and company contributions to up to 4% to employees 401(k) accounts.

It is these and other positive aspects of the company that contribute to their low two to three percent turnover rate.

Bassett Mechanical contributes mightily to their community through cash and in-kind donations, but mainly through leadership in important programs.

In January 2007, Kim Bassett-Heitzmann, Bill's daughter, completed a 10 year apprenticeship and officially took over leadership of the family's 73 year-old business. She is one of a small handful of female presidents and Chief Operating Officers in a traditionally male-dominated field. Kim has been doing odd jobs and working around the business since she was fifteen years old, washing trucks, running parts, and answering phones.

Her degree and occupation had been speech pathology, but she missed the "family" part of family business and asked to come back to the company. She went back to school for an additional masters degree in management and construction. Kim went through a rigorous apprenticeship lasting ten years within the company. She worked in each division learning every aspect of the trades.

As for things to come, roughly 24 hours after Kim took over as president, her father asked what her succession plan was. And although Kim's children are young, there is a plan in place and options are open for them to earn their place in the company.

BREUER METAL CRAFTSMEN, INC.

Grand Award Winner

Medium company category

"Completing the nomination requirements and gathering the supporting documentation has been an invigorating and pleasant walk down memory lane." That is how the nomination began for Breuer Metal Craftsmen.

Ben O Breuer, was born on July 14, 1895 in Dusseldorf, Germany where he completed his apprenticeship as a locksmith in 1912. As a member of the trade guild he was expected to "uphold at all times the honor of his trade through hard work and good behavior".

In search of a better future for himself and his family, Ben immigrated to Milwaukee in 1920 where he worked until 1940, when they moved to Beaver Dam and took a job with Western Malleable Iron Foundry. He started a business on the side making ornamental metal. But due to World War Two, metals were hard to come by and his dream was to wait until after the war.

In 1946 Beaver Dam Ornamental Brass and Iron works was established in a small rented space in a Garage. The business grew to five employees. Ben's son, Bernard, worked at the shop during the summer, learning the trade.

In 1948 Bernard left his sales position with Monarch Range Company and moved his family to Beaver Dam to join his father in the business. Ben worked in the shop and continued to teach his skills to his employees, while Bernard became general manager and his wife, Simone, was the bookkeeper.

The company was incorporated in 1956 as Breuer Metal Craftsmen, Inc. Ben and Bernard decided to build a larger and more modern facility in 1967, working on the construction at night and on weekends. The interruption of business and cost of construction resulted in serious financial hardship that took eight years to turn around. But succeed it did.

Ben passed away in 1973 and Bernard became president. Bernard's sons, Bernie Jr., Jerry, and Paul learned the complexities of running a business at an early age. During their high school years they worked alongside their parents in the company and eventually all three sons went to college, then returned to continue running the metal fabrication business started by their grandfather. They each have their own area of special responsibilities that contribute to the growth and development of the company. Bernard passed away in 1986 and Simone became president and continues in that position today.

Over time the direction of the company changed from fabricating products for residential customers to providing custom metal fabrications for general contractors and builders. Further growth required them to move yet again to larger facilities in 1989. Today, their custom steel, aluminum, bronze and brass products can be found throughout the US and beyond.

In 2002 Breuer implemented a coach/mentoring program for the purpose of training all employees to perform to the company's standards. Graduates of that program are granted the title "Craftsman" or "Master Craftsman" after completing the rigorous training program.

Breuer has been located in Beaver Dam for over sixty years and has provided work and income for hundreds of area residents during that time. They provide scholarships to graduating high school seniors, participate in the high school apprenticeship programs, and sit on the Metals Advisory committee at the high school, showing a true passion for their trade and the local community.

THE GIALAMAS COMPANY

Grand Award Winner

Small company category

This family business opened its doors in 1976 as a commercial real estate development company by George and Candy Gialamas. George traveled to Madison for his job at IBM where he worked in marketing and sales. After 14 years, George and Candy decided it was time to start new careers.

Over 30 years later, The Gialamas Company has been instrumental in several major commercial developments in Madison, and has been a driving force in the promotion of Madison, Dane County, and the state of Wisconsin.

Old Sauk Trails Business Park is the keystone of all their projects, defining the westernmost border of the City of Madison. The park has grown to hold 58 buildings, hosting over 300 companies, occupying 3 million square feet. The park's businesses alone employ over 12,000 employees creating an annual tax base of \$350 million for the city of Madison.

The Gialamas Company is truly a family business – George and Candy have worked together since the beginning, along with parents, relatives and children over the years. All have contributed to the success of the company. According to George, "Candy is an integral part of the company, along with her engineering background, and good taste, it is not difficult to live and work together as our focus has been in different areas of the company. It is tough being a father and a boss. According to George, that is his toughest job.

Core family values consist of integrity, respect, and honesty. Trust is most important to them, whether in an employee, tenant, or advisor.

The link between family and business is strong as well. George and Candy's sons, Tom and Aris are currently working in the business and are being groomed to carry it on.

For a company with only 15 employees, the footprint of this family is expansive and impressive.

The judges applauded the family's vision for developing the community, supporting the arts, and creating spaces where jobs can be born. They have created wealth that extends beyond their business to the greater community.

The Gialamas Company has been active in the philanthropy in the Madison community. They are a proud supporter of the arts including Madison Opera, Wisconsin Chamber Orchestra, Madison Symphony, Great Lakes Fund, Susan G. Koman for the Cure, and Madison Children's Museum. They not only build beautiful spaces, they help bring beauty to their communities.

THE KONOP COMPANIES

Special Award Winner

"Staying Power"

In 1946, with borrowed money to buy a route consisting of 120 peanut machines, Louie Konop started what would become a very successful family owned business in his garage. He built his route while continuing to work full time.

The penny peanut machines are no longer around, but Louie's values remain, values like honesty, integrity, dependability, responsibility, and innovative thinking are all ingrained in the everyday business practices of the company.

What started as a small vending route has grown into one of the largest independently owned vending and food service companies in Wisconsin and includes Konop Vending Machines, Konop Vending Service, Konop Food & Catering, and Konop Beverages.

Very few vending companies have their own in-house commissary and bakery but the Konops believe in offering their customers a fresher product, with better quality control and the ability to customize their product offerings.

As good nutrition became important to clients, the Konops contracted with a registered dietician to establish guidelines for their vending products. They developed the "Right Choice for a Healthier You" program. It was so successful that other vending companies in the VEND Marketing Institute began to use the concept.

The businesses rarely have job openings because employees rarely leave. With an average tenure of 12 years, employees want to stay because of the way they are treated. The owners value the way they are treated and they value their input and ideas.

The family has had an impact on their communities. The Konop Foundation contributes to numerous local charities like YMCA, YWCA, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, Boys and Girls Club, and many others.

Louie's children, Tom, Dave, and Mary grew up with the business in their blood and were introduced to Louie's work ethic as children. In fact, when Louie and his wife, Patricia were on the way to the hospital for the birth of Dave, Louie insisted they stop so he could make a service call to fix an out-of-order vending machine.

From early ages the children had responsibilities in the business on a daily basis from filling orders for route drivers, to counting daily deposits, to lawn mowing and weed pulling. Today, they are the owners and officers in the business, continuing the family legacy.

The judges named this award "Staying Power" because the Konops are doing what it takes to stay in the game as a family, as a business, and as good citizens.

VOGEL BROS. BUILDING CO.

Special Award Winner

"More than a Family Business"

Not only has this family business become part of the fabric of the community, they have created some of its most recognizable buildings in southern Wisconsin. This Special Award goes to Vogel Brothers Building Company of Madison.

George C. Vogel came to Madison about 1875 and opened a cabinet and wagon making shop. As wagons became obsolete, the business evolved into construction. Sons Henry and George II later joined their father and incorporated Vogel Brothers Building in 1928. George II served as President until his nephew Ralph Vogel became president in 1962. David Vogel assumed leadership in 1969 upon Ralph's untimely death. In 1980 the family opened a Florida branch. In 1995, David's sons Daniel and Peter acquired majority ownership of the company, with Daniel named president of the Florida operation and Peter president of the Madison operation. Daniel was tragically killed in a car accident in 2004 and Peter assumed his roles in Florida. The fabric of the family allowed them to succeed even when confronted with adversity.

The success of Vogel Brothers Building Company is directly related to the respect and admiration shared in the Vogel Family. Each generation spent their early years working with their father or uncle after school and in the summers. Many non-owner family members have worked in the trades or in office positions. Other families are linked with the success of the company having second and third generation carpenters, foreman, laborers, and superintendents as Vogel employees.

Vogel family members and staff have a history of serving on boards and committees serving the communities. In 1989 the company formed a charitable foundation. They supply 135 schools in Dave County with their "School Supplies for Kids" program, last year supplying over \$50,000 worth of school supplies packed in brand new backpacks.

Vogel Brothers recently celebrated their 80th anniversary, and are ready for the next 80. David and Peter are confident that one of David's eleven grandchildren will provide future leadership for the company as they choose their careers.

SHERMAN PLAZA, INC.

Special Award Winner

"Anchoring the Neighborhood"

In 1856, a German Immigrant came to the United States and settled in Madison. When Ernest Bruns came to Madison from Hanover, he was 21 years old. Little did he know that his hard work would lead to anchor one of Madison's neighborhoods.

Ernest and his wife settled on land on the Northern end of the city and began to farm, selling eggs to the local markets. In the 1880's Ernest passed his farm on to his son, Ernest August Bruns, who established the EA Bruns Dairy in 1899. The dairy farm flourished, selling milk in the Madison area. In 1953, Ernest August's sons, Ernest E. and Richard, took over and at the request of the Madison Mayor, established Sherman Plaza, Inc., one of Madison's first shopping centers.

Since that time, Sherman Plaza has been passed down to the fourth generation, David W. and Donald B. Bruns. The original Bruns farm land is home to an established enterprise of multiple residential and retail properties.

Throughout history and still continuing today, the Bruns' and Sherman Plaza have spearheaded numerous community events, fundraisers, and initiatives that have helped to make Madison's Northside community what it is today.

Caring about the community is part of their mission. They make it their duty to make sure their neighbors are well served by the businesses in their centers. It started with eggs and milk in the 1850's and continues on with the family making sure there is a neighborhood grocery store, livable housing, and a sense of community.

In the coming years Sherman Plaza will be handed down to the fifth generation. Specific succession steps for the Bruns children have included higher education along with working in all aspects of the operations of the business.

The Bruns Family has lived on Madison's Northside for over 150 years. That is why the judges awarded Sherman Plaza, and the Bruns family this Special Award titled "Anchoring the Neighborhood Award".