

Wisconsin Family Business of the Year Award Winners - 2010

Grand Award – Large Company **Miron Construction Company, Inc.**

Founded in 1918 by a Canadian immigrant who settled in the Fox River Valley, Miron Construction has grown to be one of Wisconsin's largest general contracting firms. Patrick Miron started a family business that is now being managed by the third generation, and the fourth is in the wings.

Miron has a culture and a passion for building. They have been providing professional construction services to clients throughout the Midwest, and more recently the nation for the past ninety two years. They have twelve hundred employees. Their corporate headquarters is in Neenah, and they have added regional offices in Wausau, Madison, and Milwaukee. They have been involved in high profile projects such as the Lambeau Field redevelopment, the Resch Center Arena in Green Bay, and the new Dane County Courthouse.

There is a strong link between the family's values and the business mission. The Voss and Kippenhan families boast strong Christian values, a solid work ethic and strive to fill their ranks with employees who share those values. Their mission statement says that they exist to *Create Relationships; Fulfill Dreams; Promote Innovation; Develop Solutions; Integrate Sustainability; and Serve their Communities.*

The business has been recognized for many other honors recently including *Business of the Year* by the Appleton Post Crescent, *Most Admired Company in Wisconsin* by Corporate Report Wisconsin, and they were honored with a *Philanthropy Day Award* by the Association of Fundraising Professionals in 2009.

Miron is renowned for its community-minded endeavors. They play an active role contributing to projects that create great places to live, work, and play. Each year, Miron averages two charitable construction projects and contributes over \$750,000 to community projects and organizations. In addition, a large proportion of Miron employees donate their own time to help ensure successful events. Big Brothers/Big Sisters, Boys and Girls Club, Habitat for Humanity, Junior Achievement, Fox Cities Performing Arts Center, and Saint Joe's Food Pantry.

Miron is a family-owned company in its third generation. The current Chief Operating officer Tim Kippenhan will move into the CEO position held by David Voss. David's children David, Dan Mike and Katie work in the business and are being groomed and will take on additional responsibilities when the time comes.

Grand Award – Medium Company
Gordy's Lakefront Marine, Inc.

This family business is all about creating great experiences. They are a landmark, a fixture, a legend. On the shores of Lake Geneva, Gordy's Lakefront Marine has been satisfying customers since 1955.

Fueled by the love of outdoor activities and the local community, Gordy Whowell began a seasonal boat ride and rental business in Fontana. In the years following, Gordy purchased adjoining businesses and property to expand the business.

Gordy's operations consists of a marina, the Boat House Restaurant, Pro Shop, Bait Shop, Lawn Care, Tours, Farms, and boat show rooms, and boat storage.

Although Gordy had a significant role in the operations until his death in 1988, his son Tom had taken over as of 1969. Tom and his wife, Geri raised their four children in the seasonal hustle and bustle of a resort town. Each of them had a hand in the development of the company from an early stage. This third generation each left briefly for college, and returned to run accounting, sales, marketing and operations. It is this third generation that is currently running the business.

Each of the third generation has worked in every operation of the business to gain an understanding of the enterprise. The family exhibits one of the benchmark attributes of successful family businesses; they hold weekly family meetings to discuss all aspects of the operation. In the past two years they have developed a Family Council that meets quarterly and has clearly defined roles and expectations. They see the council as a way of preserving the family tradition and ownership while giving structure and education to future generations.

Gordy's understands the importance of preserving the tradition and beauty that makes Fontana and Lake Geneva the wonderful places they are. In addition to assisting over 50 organizations with their time, facilities and money, Gordy's has donated over 30 acres of land to the Geneva Lakes Conservancy, and goes to great lengths to beautify the land and buildings they own.

This is a family that not only knows how to have fun, it is their mission to teach others how to have fun, on the water.

Grand Award – Small Company

Home Lumber Company

Our first Grand Award goes to a family business that is celebrating one hundred and twenty five years in business this year. Home Lumber Company of Whitewater can trace its roots to Jack Preston Hale, the great-great grandfather of the current owner. Jack was a carpenter and coffin maker in Melbourne England. That tradition of working with wood was passed to the United States when Jack's grandson, Jack Hale emigrated to Whitewater in the early 1900s.

Jack had a long history of construction in the Whitewater community and was famous for crafting the very best built homes, barns and churches in the area. Jack had a passion for true craftsmanship and taught all who worked with him, including his son, Don, how to build it right the first time.

That love of building, of wood, and of sawdust is what the family's legacy is built upon. In the heart of what was old growth timber forests, the Hale Family's sawmills were located, powered by the waters flowing from the Kettle Moraine.

The business progressed to providing coal and lumber for the growing area. The biggest challenge to the family and the business came in 1967 when just before the grand opening of a new facility, located in downtown Whitewater, the fully stocked buildings burned to the ground, taking all their inventory, but not their spirit. With the help of friends, a replacement building was constructed to continue providing construction materials to their customers.

They refused to leave the downtown Whitewater and built a larger facility that included the first drive through lumber yard at the time. They were innovators in other areas as well. Home Lumber began selling mail order power tools through magazine advertising. They became the first Internet marketer of power tools in 1996. They were recognized in 2003 by Money Magazine as the best place to buy power tools.

With a deep concern for leaving the world a better place than they found it, the importance of giving back to the community has been a family tradition. Don's wife was forever helping out a family in need through church or the many organizations she belonged to. As a professional clown, she devoted most weekends to every benefit one could imagine. Don, who served his country as a naval aviator, served his community in ways beyond the service counter of the lumber yard. At 85, he still delivers meals on wheels.

That spirit of giving back carries on. Since the inception of Habitat for Humanity, Home Lumber has contributed more that \$160,000 in donated materials, volunteer time and money. They have been involved in building seven homes.

Now, Don Hale, his sons Goeff, and his wife Jacki, brother Jack, brother in law Jay, sister in law, Judy and Goeff's sons Chris, Mike and Mac all have and active role in the business.

In answer to the question we asked in the nomination form "Is it your intention to pass the business on to future generations" they said "We have been in the **generation** business and plan to continue that tradition. Our boys seem to be solidifying sawdust in their veins and this business will be owned by a Hale, hopefully into the sixth and seventh generations.

CJ & Associates, Inc., New Berlin
Special Award - “Families 4 Families”

This nomination started out “I am proud to submit this nomination on behalf of CJ & Associates and in honor of my parents, Curt & Judy Rudy. Their perseverance, dedication and commitment have always been something I’ve admired”.

CJ & Associates is a woman and family owned interior design and office furniture company founded in 1984 in New Berlin. Currently six family members are employed representing two generations. Curt and Judy Rudy are in the business with their son Greg, and his wife Lisa, and with their daughter, Kim Hastings, the author of the nomination, and her husband, Daryl.

They Rudys were able to successfully balance the demands and responsibility of growing a new business with always being there for their family. The loyalty and commitment they demonstrate to their employees is inspiring.

They have a very unique culture, one that is fun, maybe a bit corny, but most importantly one that empowers employees to have a voice and to help the company and people grow.

The workplace evolution continues as the new generation that Twitters, blogs, Facebooks and texts enters in, they rise to the challenge and continue to find unique and interesting ways to stimulate, attract and retain this generation.

CJ has been named one of the *Top 25 Largest Women-Owned Businesses* in Wisconsin, a **Top Milwaukee Workplace**, and was selected to the Milwaukee Chamber of Commerce *Council of Small Business Executives Future 50 List*.

The company has Ten Guiding Principles that help them stay focused. The judges noted the last three show an impressive commitment to excellence:

“Never let profits trump ethics”,

“Be the first one in and the last one to leave”, and

“You are the one who has to look at yourself in the mirror each morning and as long as you are OK with what and who you see looking back, then you can be confident that you are doing the right thing”.

CJ & Associates has a strong belief in supporting the community. They founded “**Families 4 Families**”, an organization that is committed to educating people on the risks of heart disease. Along with providing education to external and internal customers about heart disease prevention, they have a business culture that supports exercise and healthy eating habits. Their motto is “We may be small, but we are proud, powerful, and passionate”.

Rechek's Food Pride, Beaver Dam Special Award - "Food for Thought"

This Special Award winner has had an impact on thousands of lives in the Beaver Dam area. Jerry and Marcia Rechek purchased an existing grocery store Jerry had been working for in 1985. They renamed the store "Rechek's Jack and Jill". They work to provide a work environment that would be special to both associates and customers. At that time they had 30 employees.

In 1996 they expanded when they built a new 30,000 square foot store that added a Deli, a scratch bakery, and a state inspected sausage kitchen, and renamed the store Rechek's Food Pride.

Jerry and Marcia are so committed to the grocery industry that they have engraved on their headstone "Two Grocers Who Always Tried to Treat Everyone with Respect". And, Jerry's license plate reads "I Feed Em".

Jerry and Marcia's son, Brett, worked at the store, bagging groceries and stocking shelves. The Rechecks implement a best practice of family businesses. They require family members interested in working in the business to work outside the business for two years. Both Brett and brother, Judd left the business to fulfill that policy.

Two generations have been involved in ownership and management. Jerry is founder and past president. Brett is current president and majority owner. Jerry and Marcia's son, Judd, makes Grandpa Rechek's award winning sausage, and plans to buy into the business with his brother Brett within the next five years. Jerry and Marcia are intending to fully retire in three years.

The Rechecks believe in giving back to the community. Since building their new store in 1996, they have donated over \$650,000 to local non-profit organizations. They provide access to a stand in front of the store to non-profit groups to sell brats and burgers for fundraisers. It is fully booked from April to October. Jerry is the president of Green Valley Enterprises board of directors. This organization is a non-profit serving physically and mentally handicapped persons from infants to adults with Alzheimers.

Today, they employ 160 people. The "carryout associates", mainly high school students, carry out **all** orders and jog back into the store to serve the next customer. They also employ approximately 12 – 15 "retired men and women" that work approximately nine months per year when school is in session. They name their own hours and are off on weekends, holidays and whenever there is no school.

They provide health insurance to all associates that average over 30 hours per week with no deductable and only \$15 co-pay. Annually, they offer four to six \$1,000 scholarships to high school graduates that worked at Rechek's Food Pride.

Rehek's was named one of the top 100 grocery stores in the nation by Progressive Grocer Magazine in 1996, 1997, and 1998, and with good reason.

Ryan Brothers Ambulance, Inc., Madison **Special Award - “First Community Response”**

This family business started out tending to accidents, and shootings, and even delivering babies. With Red Cross instruction and a lot of on-the-job training, brothers Paul and Pat Ryan started Ryan Brothers Ambulance.

In July of 1962 they applied for an unsecured loan with a local bank to purchase their first ambulance. They operated out of the Ryan Funeral Home on King Street in Madison. Operating with just two employees and family members, they worked every day and night for the first five years.

They had discovered a niche serving the Veterans Administration and local nursing homes and rehab centers, transferring patients between facilities. Their philosophy is to care for the elderly with dignity. They pride themselves at honoring last wishes of Hospice patients whenever possible. That core value generated steady business for the next thirty years.

While the business grew, so did the family. Pat and his wife Joanne were raising three sons, Erin, Patrick and Tommy.

Brothers Pat and Paul worked many of the 24/7 shifts themselves, often taking the ambulance home so they could have dinner with the family before returning to work. Pat’s sons worked at the business part time after high school, but it was not their intent to transition the business to the next generation. Pat, Senior was clear to the boys that the business was tough and demanded attention 24/7.

Pat Senior’s brother Paul passed away suddenly in 1994. Erin and Pat finished their college degrees and went to work for their father. As he watched his sons work together, he realized they were serious about their new careers.

In 1998 Pat Senior handed over the operation to his sons and each found a natural division of responsibilities with Patrick overseeing administration and Erin managing operations. They bought the company from their father in 2004.

Today, they operate three stations in Madison with a fleet of 15 ambulances. They opened a station in Fort Atkinson in 2002 where they also provide 9-1-1 services. Their fifth station was opened in Deerfield in 2008. Their sixth station opens this month in Sun Prairie.

Ryan Brothers Ambulance participates in many community events and organizations. They are the sole ambulance provider for the annual Ironman event in Madison. They volunteer to serve Meals on Wheels. Participate and sponsor the annual St. Patrick’s Day parade in Madison. And they fund an annual scholarship for graduating seniors at East High School in Madison.

Sowinski Farms, Inc., Rhinelander

Special Award - “Chip off the Old Block”

This family business had its origins when the patriarch and his wife moved to the United States from Poland in 1908. Stanley and Constance Sowinski started a family, and a family business that is now in the fifth generation. They had a son, Henry, born in Milwaukee shortly after arriving from Poland. Henry married Evelyn. Together with his parents they worked a dairy farm and logging operation. The land they bought to log became the future fields they planted in potatoes and other crops.

Henry and Evelyn Sowinski had five children. Two of those children, Alvin and David, along with Henry, started the potato operation in the late 1940s. Like most kids of their generation, Alvin and David helped clear land, pick rocks, pull stumps drive tractors and operate farm equipment from around age seven. As they grew, they learned to fix equipment and build some of their own farm machinery, like their grandfather, Stanley did.

When the dairy operation was no longer profitable, and logging had slowed, they did whatever they could to keep the farm running including selling Christmas trees and driving semi-trucks to deliver their crops.

Today the family operates farms in Sugar Camp, Wisconsin and have expanded to Missouri to allow them to grow potatoes with a longer growing season. They own and operate 7,300 acres with 4,300 in potatoes and are a major supplier of to the snack food industry. That’s a lot of potato chips! They invest in state of the art computerized equipment outfitted with GPS farm management systems onboard.

The fourth generation included Alvin’s son, Paul, who is vice president of the farm. Also included are David’s sons Gregory and John who are also vice presidents. David’s son-in-law is a driver for the farm and John’s wife, Brenda oversees the Missouri office.

Linking the family to business just happened over, time. Because all five generations have lived and worked in the outdoors, the business became a way of life. Stanley, having been a builder and engineer who spoke six languages laid a strong foundation for Henry.

Church, home and school were their primary concerns, along with the betterment of the community. If a barn or home burned, everyone helped their neighbors. These were the family values instilled in each generation.

They remain very involved in the community. Alvin and David were members of the National Guard. Alvin was chief of the local fire department. Paul was a Sugar Camp town supervisor. For twenty years the family gave a scholarship to a local high school graduate in member of Alvin and Shirley’s son, Vincent, who died in 1988.

Succession plans are in place. Land and shares have been gifted to the next generation. All family members share in the future plans of the business.

David, Gregory, Alvin and Paul are owners. Greg's son, Jimmy is now working for the farm. As the next generation completes their education and decides if they want to make the commitment necessary to take the farm into the future. "God willing, it will continue.

This Special Award was titled by the judges to honor the legacy of Polish Immigrants, Stanley and Constance, and reflective of the Sowinski Farm product – it is called - "Chip off the Old Block".

The Wisconsin Family Business of the Year Award is sponsored by Smith & Gesteland, LLP, a CPA and consulting firm; DeWitt Ross & Stevens SC, a law firm; and Associated Bank. All of the sponsors are committed to helping family businesses thrive.

Questions?

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