



## **Grand Award – Small Company Wiedenbeck, Inc.**

In case you don't remember what was happening in 1894, one hundred and twenty-three years ago, that was the year Grover Cleveland was President of the United States, Coca Cola was sold in bottles for the first time, and the Hershey Chocolate Company was established. That's also the year Theodore Wiedenbeck, with two colleagues, founded what would become Wiedenbeck, Inc.

The company began as a wagon maker and blacksmith supplier. When Theodore Wiedenbeck wanted to expand business outside of Madison in the late 1890s, he started out toward other towns on his bicycle, but had to abandon the effort when he got stuck in the sand in Belleville. He proved he was open to trying new ideas, though, and the family believes that has been a key to Wiedenbeck's success ever since.

By the early 1900s, Wiedenbeck was well established as a hardware wholesaler. After World War II, the company evolved into an implement dealer and iron supplier. Today, it is primarily a metal distributor and metal fabricator. It also provides construction grade hardware items such as fasteners, tools, and metalworking supplies.

Company co-owners are fourth generation family members Jim Wiedenbeck, Jr. and Jane Wiedenbeck Young. Jane's son Ben works for the company, too, learning the business from the ground up. That's the fifth generation!

When asked what makes the business special, the owners first mention their 19 employees. They are just plain awesome and incredibly loyal, they say, and their dedication makes it hard to fail. The second thing they point out is the fact that they also sell construction grade hardware items, giving their customers a one-stop shopping advantage that their competitors can't provide. And because they are one of the smaller companies in their category, they have significantly lower overhead costs than the larger players, and a personal connection with their customers. This allows them to shift quickly to accommodate customers' urgent or unexpected needs.

The earliest records the company has are some handwritten ledgers that include the sale of items such as horseshoes and wagon wheels. But since those early days, things have changed a lot. With new technology that allows the company to track the volume of steel sold, they state proudly that they have grown 77 percent since 2011.

The judges were impressed by the five generations of this family business, their dedication to each other and their employees, and their commitment to giving back to the community by giving employees time off to volunteer in organizations that are meaningful to them.

The Grand Award in the Small Company category goes to Wiedenbeck, Inc., of Monona.

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