Waunakee's oldest industry prides itself on family

Endres Manufacturing, relatively speaking

Several family members gathered in a large work area inside Endres Manufacturing on the morning of March 25. (photo by Roger Hamilton)

Waunakee has grown at an astonishing rate in the last decades. What once was farmland east of town is now a huge industrial-business park. Straggling residential areas north and southeast of town are now huge developments that continue to grow. Looking at Waunakee from a bird's perspective, one could assume all its small-town mentality had gone the way of Stokely and Sentry.

But a closer look reveals many aspects of Waunakee that continue to help it maintain this close atmosphere. Polka bands still perform at the Legion for fish fries Friday nights. Village life still revolves around two main streets, though old timers might say Century Avenue doesn't deserve such recognition. And stop signs are still more prevalent than stop lights.

One business that has remained in touch with Waunakee's small-town history is Endres Manufacturing Company on the village's south side. Besides conveying Waunakee's largely German heritage to passersby through its Bavarian architecture, Endres maintains a workforce reflective of small-town shops: Of the 49 employees, 16 are immediate family members of each other, not to mention all the cousins and other more distant relations.

Diane Taylor started working at Endres in 2003. She started there because she needed full-time employment coming out of school, and her brother Wayne Hellenbrand – then an employee of the company for 14 years – told her Endres was hiring.

"If he and I do want to talk, it's fun to be able to do so at work," she said. Then, laughing, "I make his life so much better."

Diane works in the office. Wayne is a welder of stair and railing items. Wayne's glad she doesn't weld too.

"She likes to have me run her errands and otherwise boss me around," said Wayne, smiling. "The more she stays in her cage, cubicle, whatever, the better. Still, I suppose she keeps me up on family happenings better than if she didn't work here."

According to Charlie Endres, his brother, Al, keeps him up on happenings in the workplace. They've worked together at Endres for 20 years, though Charlie worked there near 10 years prior.

"I trained him to do sheet metal," said Charlie, currently a welder. Then, smiling, "I think he tries to avoid me a little now since he thinks I'm too fussy."

Al said Charlie communicates just like their dad would, saying just enough.

"When Charlie was showing me how to do my job – and when he's showing me how to do anything in general – he'll say something along the lines of, 'This is what I'd do, but you have to find out what works for you,' " said Al. "He usually gets right to the point. When you've interacted your whole lives, you can say stuff quickly and know they'll understand fully."

Endres doesn't just have siblings that work together. There are also three father-son duos. Bill Pertzborn and his son, Jason, are recent additions to the Endres workforce.

"This is Jason's first full-time job," said Bill. "I'm glad he can just call 'Dad' when he needs help. Plus, it's good to still be able to see him every day, and to continue to help him learn."

From time to time, Bill and Jason work right next to each other. Bill grinds finished metal products when welders are done with them, and Jason paints metal before it's loaded and delivered.

"It's great to have dad there when something's troubling me," said Jason.

Gordy and Jon Acker are another such duo. They both weld and otherwise fabricate metal pieces that are used in structural support of buildings. Gordy has worked at Endres since 1969 and is set to retire March 28 after 39 years.

"Though I do help Jon, I told him when he started working here to not come knocking too often, or people'd start talking," said Gordy. "He's done a good job of not depending on me too much."

"From where I started to where I am now," said Jon, "I think Dad's proud to see how I've grown."

President Ken Ballweg and his son, Sam, direct the company. Sam is the great-grandson of Endres' founder, Lawrence Endres. Ken is passing his responsibilities to Sam.

"I keep Sam challenged and might even intimidate him," said Ken, "but I think he feels good that he can rely on me to make sure things work out right even though it might not be the way he'd do it."

"Dad's a good presence, a mentor, someone knowledgeable to have around," said Sam. "In exchange, I give him the confidence to know the family business will go on."

There used to be a whole family that worked at Endres. Though the parents, Bob and Shirley, have since retired, Randy and Craig Kopp remain. Randy is the shipping coordinator and Craig is a truck driver, so they work very closely together.

"Craig can be a real pain in the you-know-where," said Randy, laughing. "We know how to push each other's buttons. But we also know how to get along better and work together to get the job done."

"I suppose I can be a pain sometimes," said Craig, "but disagreements here and there – that's a part of any job. If he would have listened to me that one time about not yanking that block out, he'd still have his finger," he said with a chuckle.

Brian Joseph is the other full-time truck driver at Endres. He's worked there 10 years. His brother, Chris, started there five years ago.

"Being his older brother and working at Endres longer, Chris looked to me for guidance when he first arrived," said Brian. "He's a good worker, and when we worked together, stuff flowed better."

Chris used to be a painter, but just recently moved to the opposite end of the process, offloading steel from suppliers and bringing it to the saws to begin fabrication.

"Work did flow well when we worked together," said Chris. "It wasn't a distraction having my brother there. When you swipe the time card, all the family stuff stays behind, and there's work to do."

Kurt Ballweg heard about a possible job at Endres from Endres' founder's son and past-president Larry Endres. Kurt, in turn, got his brother, Nick, a job there too. As well as punching holes in larger metal pieces, Kurt makes parts lists by reading blueprints. These lists tell Nick what he needs to produce in his small-parts shop. Working together has been good for their relationship.

"There's a 10-year age difference between us," said Kurt, "so I probably wouldn't know him as well if we didn't work together. As his older brother, I need to set a good example."

"Back when I was young and dumb, Kurt would say, 'You're making me look bad,' " said Nick. "It's no big deal now, though. I think I'd have felt the same way if I was in his shoes."

The presence of family members can add a different dimension to work. But since its inception in 1926 at West Street, Endres has felt this dimension is more positive than negative. It's part of what keeps Endres – and Waunakee – a close-knit community.

The extended Endres family

Numerous relatives have made or continue to make an impact at Endres. Darlene Meinholz, wife of welder Gerard, takes care of the Endres grounds during the summer months.

Nick Oldroyd, college son of draftsman Charlie, helped in the office during the previous summer while two office members were on maternity leave. Shirley and Bob Kopp worked a combined 67 years at Endres. Diane Endres Ballweg, Ken's wife and granddaughter of company founder Lawrence, does public relations work and community philanthropy as president of the Endres Foundation.

Their son, Ben, fills a consulting role, and daughter Kate helps during her school breaks. Lee Grubb, Diane's mother, was the business' first bookkeeper. Julie Fellows and Connie Lange worked in the office with their husbands Randy and Tom. Ron Wagner's sons Chad and Josh help him install pier from time to time.

And the list goes on.

Law: 16-year-olds can give blood

The Red Cross is reaching out to younger blood donors. Sixteen-year-olds can give blood under a law signed by Gov. Jim Doyle, Wisconsin Public Radio reports.

When the American Red Cross needs blood, there are some studies that indicate if people donate two or more times in a row, they're more likely to become lifetime, regular donors, she said. By enabling 16-year-olds to donate in high school, it gives them added opportunities to

Local woman nominated for 'woman of the year'

A Waunakee woman is among several nominated for the Madison Woman of the Year Award.

Chris Gilbertson, President endorsed by the State of Wisconsin Chiefs of Police Association and will soon be going statewide.

Chris has four children, two

SENIOR CENT

Reception desk – 849-8385; Nutrition – 849-83

REMINDER: If the Waunakee schools are cl weather, the senior center will also be closed a provided.

SERVICES:

Lunch: Served Monday through Friday at 11:3 needed by 2 p.m. day prior. Home delivered me

Blood Pressure Checks: Second Tuesday - n - 11:30 a.m.

Foot Care Clinic: Second Tuesday of the mon Tuesday - noon; first Wednesday - 8:30 a.m. Brin towels. Call for appointment. No foot care if yo

Massage Therapy: Available Monday, Thurs appointment.

Care Giver Support Group meets the third T at 3:30 p.m.

HEARTBEAT Support Group meets the thi month at 6:30 p.m. at the senior center.

Parkinson's Support Group meets the four month at 2 p.m. at the Senior Center.

FOR YOUR INFORMATION:

SHARE pick-up location is at Waunakee Are S. Madison St. Cost is $20.80. Contact Mary U more information. Pick-up is Saturday, March a.m.

UPCOMING PRESENTATIONS/SPEAKERS:

Wednesday, April 2, 12:30 p.m. - "Remembe by Sarah White.

ROMEO BREAKFAST

The ROMEO Breakfast is Tuesday, April 15, later than Thursday, April 10.

UPCOMING TSI TRIPS: April 2 - Target; A Station; April 16 - Aldi Store (groceries and mo Towne; April 30 - East Towne.

The bus is now available to take you shopping Walgreens on Wednesday mornings. All shoppi the senior center at 9:30 a.m. or you can be picke Bus returns from shopping at approximately 1:3 must be made by the day prior to the trip. Roun ping trips out of Waunakee is $2; in Waunakee,

UPCOMING Trips:

Daniel O'Donnell Concert in Iowa - 2-day 25, 2008. Includes a tour of the Abbey Hotel, the and Longaberger Basket Displays, the concert, Cruise. Cost: Double occupancy - $310 per perso - $379. A $50 non-refundable deposit is due with ing a reservation. Space is limited, so make you by calling 849-8385.

Fireside Dinner Theater Outing - Wednesday 9 a.m. for a matinee performance of "Anything Cole Porter. Cost is $79 per person and includes 849-8385 to make your reservation.

FRIDAY MOVIES: March 28 - "310 to Yuma" "No Reservations" (rated PG), April 25 - "The Club (rated PG-13).

Opportunities:

Wood Carvers group meets each Monday fro

TOPS (Take Off Pounds Sensibly) group mee ter every Wednesday from 9-10 a.m. Fee is $24 a

Pot Luck is held the third Monday of the m p.m. Bring a dish to pass and join us for some Following potluck, those who wish to can stay f 6 p.m.

Cribbage is played on Wednesday at 12:30 p. at noon each Monday in the Activity Room - co ter if you are interested in playing; **Drop-In B** p.m. each Monday in the Senior Center Dinin played each Thursday at 12:30 p.m.

Stop in and see the great selection of Mar cards the Senior Center now sells as part of its o Quality cards at a great price.

Scrabble is played on Wednesdays at 10:30 a

We are looking for **Duplicate Bridge** players. Senior Center.

Chorus Group: If interested, please contact 850-6238.

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED: The senior center is teers who are willing to assist our Interim Health Foot Care Services (making appointments, tal preparing water for soaking). Also, volunteers a from the dining area to the Wellness rooms for b ices. If you are interested in any of these volu please call the center.

The Center is looking for Meals on Wheels drivers. Call Cindy at 849-8385 or Gene Kunde can help.

Surprise Son

with a

Happy Birthday Greeting in The Wau

Stop in o 105 South St for