



CRAIG SCHREINER/WJS photos

Former president of Endres Manufacturing, Larry Endres, center, still comes in to the steel fabrication plant he ran from 1936 until 1990 when he passed the reins to his son-in-law Ken Bailweg, left, Sam Bailweg, right, recently graduated from Boston College and plans to join his mother, father and grandfather in the business. Diane Bailweg is the company's foundation president.

Work, flexibility paid off

Endres has grown to be multimillion-dollar steel fabricator

By Lisa Schuetz
Wisconsin State Journal

TOWN OF WESTPORT — Four generations and 75 years after opening, a family business has grown to be multimillion-dollar steel fabricator and landmark on the edge of Waunakee.

President Ken Bailweg and his father-in-law Larry Endres said Endres Manufacturing's success is due to "good old-fashioned hard work," valuable employees and flexible management.

The company welds, shapes and puts holes in about 10,000 tons of steel a year, about 95 percent of it for structures. It has revenues of about \$20 million annually, Bailweg said, but only because Endres had the vision to change with the times.

Endres' father, former farmer and barn builder Lawrence M. Endres started the business in 1926 as L. M. Endres Manufacturing Co. He moved from Springfield Corners to Waunakee to be near the railroad line when he opened what was then an invention business.

Endres, born two years before his father started the



Since 1980, the exterior of Endres Manufacturing's steel fabrication plant just outside Waunakee has evolved from a single blue steel building to an increasingly elaborate replica of a Bavarian village. Among the newer additions is the figure of a German girl made of steel. She is holding a banner that announces the company's 75th anniversary, which is being celebrated this weekend.

company, said he spent his childhood playing at his father's shop.

When his father became ill with Parkinson's disease, Endres took over the firm, which had already been renamed Endres Manufacturing, at the age of 12.

"It was during the Depression," Endres said. "You grew up fast."

In those early years, he learned new aspects of the

business by simultaneously working at larger companies as a welder and later an inspector, he said.

The company evolved as steel needs changed due to the Depression and World War II, Endres said.

Endres, who at 77 still works at the shop and oversees the pier construction division, started fabricating structural steel in the 1950s. In 1966, when he ran out of

space in the village, the company moved just outside Waunakee to the town of Westport.

Over the years, the company has fabricated steel for many of Madison's major building projects starting with the Milwaukee Street Post Office in 1974.

Recent projects include UW-Madison buildings such

Please see ENORE5, Page E2

Endres

Continued from Page E1

as Grainger Hall, the Fluno Center and the new pharmacy building, Ballweg said.

A significant change it has experienced as a steel fabricator is the shift in the portion of costs made up by labor, Endres said. "Years ago, about 25 percent of the costs were labor and 75 percent material. Now it's flip-flopped and 75 percent of our costs are labor."

Ballweg, who took over the reins in 1990, said he strives to make sure the business runs efficiently, but not at the expense of its laborers.

"It takes a lot of hard work, but they're your number one asset," he said. "The atmosphere has a family feeling. We care for our employees. When they suffer, we suffer."

The company is well-known for its generosity in Waunakee. "They have been tremendously supportive," said Monsignor James Gunn of St. John's Catholic Church in Waunakee. "They support the people that they work with as well as schools and the parish and the community itself. They have a great spirit."

Of its 45 employees, five have worked there more than 30 years, 10 for more than 20 years and 12 for more than 10 years. "The average length of employment here is 14 years."

Endres Manufacturing also has a generous profit-sharing plan because, Endres said, "you've got to share with your employees."

And at a time when multigeneration family businesses are the exception, Lawrence Endres' great-grandson is preparing to join the family firm.

Sam Ballweg, a recent business graduate of Boston College, said he's going to work elsewhere a couple years first before joining the business full-time. "I've learned more from these guys than from any books," he said of his grandfather and father. "I know what the reality is."