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SPOTLIGHTING MANUFACTURERS AND MAKERS IN CARROLL AND JO DAVIESS COUNTIES



Precision Metallurgy at it's Finest - Literally

If ever there was a niche business to be had in Jo Daviess County, Guide Line Industries in rural Scales Mound, Illinois, has definitely found it. With over 30 years in business, this third generation family-owned company specializes in the production of wire guide eyelets for a large specific range of winding applications, including stator motor winding, bobbin winding and customized applications for coil winding machines. Customers in a wide range of industries such as motor, medical, transformers, aviation and aerospace have come to rely on Guide Line Industries, which has now grown into a world supplier of these products.

For Guide Line Industries though, the progress has been slow, but sure, over their humble beginnings. It all started with Hans Pingel who was a full-time plant manager at Autotrol in Crystal Lake, Illinois, raising a family of

six with his wife, Hella. As a degreed machine builder from Germany who migrated to Illinois in the 1960s, he spent his extra time in a spare room in their home creating Guide Line Industries with his innovations. But the family yearned for something more.

"They wanted to get away from city life," said Deena Pingel, Hans's daughter-in-law who is the head of HR, Sales and Administration. "Every weekend they would take drives looking for the perfect spot to relocate."

In 1987 the Pingels moved - *with Hans being 55 years old by then* - buying

their 10 acres on the Schapeville Road, outside of Scales Mound. Mastering the production of quality wire guides in a 2,000 square foot building, Hans also spent his time teaching both his son, David, and daughter, Diane, his craft, which they readily embraced and grew with. Over the years, they managed to even employ a few local residents, but today with the modern machinery updates and streamlining of their operation, the company is run and operated entirely by family: David and Diane, along with Deena and Ryan Zmich, Diane's son.



Metal Guide Lines shown above are honed to miniscule internal eyelets and guides to accommodate feeding even the smallest wire through them for spooling purposes.



From left to right: David Pingel, Owner, President and Engineer, Deena Pingel, HR, Sales and Administration; Diane Brosamer, Owner, Vice President and Production Manager and Ryan Zmich, Production Manager.

“It is a very niche business,” said David. “It’s very precise, custom work. Accuracy and precision is a must.”

According to David, customers will usually come to them with a design for the piece they need made. “We have to work with them closely to make sure the tooling works.” And David says that can take from 4-6 months from start to finish.

Today, Guide Line Industries has a customer base of over 70 large and small companies and all with different needs. While they supply to U.S. businesses such as PNC Inc, Hilite Internation, Itasca Automation Systems and Aspen Motors, they also have international distribution in Portugal, Italy, Mexico, Brazil and Canada.

And not like other U.S. companies, China is a big competitor as well for them. For Guide Line Industries that meant they needed to make an even bigger investment to compete in the



market. Consequently, David said they had to take on even more innovative and expansion steps to keep their livelihood in the race. As a result, they had to add more state of the art and diversified machining equipment to the production floor such as CNC high pressure gun drilling capabilities, Hardinge lathes, abrasive flow, Agathon grinders, induction heat treating equipment and an atmospheric control furnace. And then to house their production expansion, they had to add another 2,000 square feet of building in 1998.

“As a result, we had to start making our own materials such as the micro tool steel we use to make our own tubing,” he said. “We are the main manufacturer of the products that we use -being the only one in the country actually producing that.”

“Other companies are making their own tubing, but it is not the tool steel that needs to be made for these guide lines,” explained David.

Regardless, David said the product is still perishable and will wear out or break, so there is still a constant need from their customer base.

“Everything is now done in house,” added Deena. “It has also cut down on our lead time so customers don’t have to wait so long to get their part as they would having to go outside the country for it.”

Time is money, she noted. “One of the reasons we are the preferred supplier for a lot of our customers is because we can beat lead times that other competitors can not meet.”

Most recently Guide Lines Industries has also undergone a physical face lift. Buildings are getting fresh paint, along with a new company sign on the building and the spacious driveway displays a newly coated surface. They are also sporting new branding and a new company-website.



So Where is Hans Now?



Comfortably retired in their country home still on the Guide Line Industries’ property, Hans and Hella still play an important role in the business they started in 1987.

When Hans isn’t pursuing his woodworking projects or perfecting his newest blend of homemade wine, he’s always available to add constructive criticism and advice to his legacy keepers.

Hella, on the other hand, keeps the crew well fed when needed and continues to be a “guide line” in her own right.

Contact Details



Guide Line Industries

Address: 1453 W. Schapeville Road
Scales Mound, IL 61075

Phone: 815-777-3722

Website: www.guidelineindustries.com

Email: guidelineindustries@gmail.com