



Old-world craftsmanship meets modern ingenuity

By Cheryl Long

"Nobody cares about the parts we make until they don't work. If you take one spring that we sell for your automatic transmission that's worth less than a cent, less than one penny a piece, and if that spring were to fail, you are going to have to load your car on a tow truck and walk home." — Ted Wallbank, President, Wallbank Manufacturing

The parts that Wallbank Manufacturing makes in the small town of Plattsville in southwestern Ontario are deceptively simple yet vital to everyday life. In fact, it's hard to imagine a world without springs and bolts. As simple as bended wire and forged steel, these indispensable parts can be found almost everywhere, whether it's the watch you're wearing, the pen you're holding or the car you're driving.



The family-owned and -operated company dates back to 1955 when Phil Wallbank started a spring-making business in the basement of his rented farmhouse using a machine he made from sewing and washing machine parts. He had apprenticed in England, his native country, as a springmaker after graduating from Grade 8, said Ted Wallbank, Phil's grandson. A spring company just a short distance away in Ayr, Ontario had sponsored Phil to come to Canada but laid him off after six months of work, forcing Phil to choose between returning to England or starting his own

business in Canada. When a large spring company went on strike, it was the perfect opportunity for Phil to pick up his first customer and Wallbank Manufacturing was born.

FROM FARMHOUSE TO FACTORY

Today, the business is a far cry from the days of the rented farmhouse. The current factory, built in 1968, has had two additions over the past few decades and now spans 55,000 square feet. Like his father and uncles before him, Ted grew up in the

family business, starting with a summer job at age 13 painting the outside of the factory with a two-inch-wide brush, he recalled. "That was my indoctrination into the business." He went on to gain formal training as a general machinist at Conestoga College in Kitchener, Ontario, did his apprenticeship and assumed an ownership share of the business in 2010. By 2012, Ted's father was ready to retire and Ted was appointed president in 2012.

Conveniently located on the Highway 401 corridor, Wallbank supplies springs, bolts and wire formings to companies in the automotive, agricultural and industrial sectors. Known for their high quality products, flexible production runs and short lead times, the business provides jobs for 28 employees. Bolts are sold through Bolts Unlimited, a division of Wallbank Manufacturing, which was launched in 2012. Many of their clients are Tier 1 automotive

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companies, Wallbank said. "If you drive a Ford or a Chevy or a Chrysler, our parts are somewhere in your car." Their diverse customer base includes telecommunications companies, makers of all terrain and recreational vehicles, agricultural equipment manufacturers — the list is endless. "... there's almost nothing that doesn't have a spring or a fastener somewhere," he explained.

Though the product may seem simple, Wallbank Manufacturing is no stranger to technological advancements. From about

1930 to 1980, there were few changes to the company's manufacturing equipment but as soon as automation and computers were introduced, the industry underwent a revolution. Certain jobs were eliminated, the cost of products came down and while the initial investment in automated machinery was expensive, it became easier to grow volume.

"We are a precision, high volume manufacturer," Wallbank said. "We don't make one spring; we make 100,000 springs. Everything we do is custom ... the bolts,



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CELEBRATING 60 YEARS OF BUSINESS

This year marks the 60th anniversary of Wallbank Manufacturing — a significant milestone for any business but particu-

larly admirable in a three-generation family business. It hasn't always been easy, Wallbank said. The odds of carrying on the family business are stacked against most companies, and there's no guarantee that the next generation has the interest or skill level to take over the reins. Wallbank knew that he had to work harder and longer than his peers, just to have an opportunity for a



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position in the company. “It’s an extremely rewarding opportunity if you can do it,” he said. “I never had to make a resume once in my life but I had to take the negative side of that privilege that went along with it.”

The positive side is working with a group of employees who are committed to the company. The average length of employ-

ment at Wallbank is 25 years, people who began working for Wallbank’s grandfather and are still with the company three generations later. “Our success is directly a result of our employees,” he said.

Wallbank and his team are looking ahead to the future, evaluating the direction the company should take and how to get there. Part of the business strategy looks at work-

ing with a larger wire capacity, different wire types and more complex forms. They’re not afraid to quote on a product that they haven’t made in the past, relying on a strong sense of innovation and ingenuity to meet their customers’ needs. If they can’t find the equipment needed to launch a new production run, they’ll simply make it themselves.

“Having an open mind to manufacturing new or unique products makes us a stronger company,” said sales representative Cody Masson. “It gives us a wider outlook on what’s out there and an in-depth understanding on the different products manufactured in the industry and how we can sustain and grow the business for the next 60 years.”

Bolts Unlimited is another area of the business that continues to make progress. “On an ongoing basis, we also continue to target the bolt side of the business,” Masson said. “That’s a new growing opportunity for us that consistently shows growth from year to year. There is a lot of potential.”

Ultimately, Wallbank Manufacturing is focusing on the trends affecting the industry, which areas are most poised for growth whether that’s 3D printing or incorporating non-traditional materials other than steel, and then becoming the best in their field.

To learn more about Wallbank Manufacturing, visit www.wallbank.com.