



Waunakee Rotary Club

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On the eve of Wauktoberfest, Waunakee Rotarians gathered for a catered lunch by Rex's Innkeeper under the beer tent and learned about the Endres Mfg. Company's history.

Ken Ballweg, Endres Mfg. president, said a lot of people drive past the Century Avenue steel fabrication company each day. Some stop in and ask where's the candy or cheese for sale, or whether they've found Rex's Innkeeper.

"We're a structural steel manufacturing business," Ken said about the Bavarian themed plant.

It all started in 1884, when Lawrence Endres Sr. was born. Raised in the Springfield Corners Martinsville area in a large, German family with a farm background, Lawrence Sr. and his brothers began inventing small equipment parts to ease the plight of area farmers.

Lawrence Sr. had a falling out with his brothers and moved to a location at 300 W. Third St., where a barn was located, as well. His goal was to sell products, and he had 16 patents in his lifetime for things like the Gripix door fastener and the Mars Magazine rifle attachment, which he sold to Sears and Roebuck for \$1 apiece. He also invented a disc sharpener to sharpen plow discs and would travel to area farms to do the sharpening himself.

Larry Endres Jr. was born in 1924, the same year the family business was started.

The family lived near the shop, so Larry spent many hours by his father's side learning from him. In 1930, Lawrence Sr. was diagnosed with Parkinsons disease, and in 1936, at the age of just 14, Larry Jr. took over production under his father's watchful eye. He worked before and after school and on weekends, and his classmates helped out, too. In

1938, Larry became aware of welding, and he bought a welder for \$96.

In 1942, Larry joined the Navy and when he returned, he briefly worked at Madison Gisholt, before deciding to put those extra hours into his own company.

Madison Gas and Electric, when it was extending pipelines, became a big customer of the welding business, and local builders began contracting with Endres Mfg. to fabricate steel beams for area home basements. The company evolved into a steel fabricator.

Most jobs were \$20,000 or less, Ken said. But the turning point came in 1976 when the Madison Post office was going to be built. Ken said he totalled up the bid, and it came to \$1 million.

"I went to Larry and asked if he really wanted to bid this project," Ken said.

Many contractors doubted Endres Mfg. was large enough, but Endres employees worked day and night to get this project out.

"We proved to ourselves that we were a real steel fabricator," Ken said.

In the mid 1960s, the company outgrew its West Street location, and Larry found the current site that was then owned by the Gilles family and had it rezoned. The initial building was 4,800 square feet, and since then, the company has added on 17 different times and is now at 115,000 square feet.

One building called the truss building was constructed in anticipation of the trusses that would be required by the St. John's Church expansion, Ken said.

Ken said the business is entering its fourth generation with his son, Sam, the grandson of Larry Endres Jr. Ken is now in his third year of his retirement succession plan, he said.

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And there is the possibility the company will span to the fifth generation, as Sam and Annie's children joined Rotarians the meeting, as well. "Life is good," Ken said.

Other items:

- Linda Olson said she will try to bring the apparel order to Wauktoberfest. If you ordered a shirt or jacket, check at the beer tent.

- President John Cullen reminded the club that the speaker on Sept. 29 will be the District Governor. Plan on showing up, he said.

Guests: Linda Ziegler, guest of Bob Ziegler; Nick Tarcz, guest of Richard Brewster; Sam Ballweg with Annie, Mike, Brooke and Brandon.

Visiting Rotarians: Steve Heck, Downtown.

Birthdays: Sept. 30, John Cullen.

Anniversaries: Sept. 29, Alan and Marie Langeteig; Oct. 5, Dan and Kristin Statz.

Prayers: Sept. 29, Susan Vergeront; Oct. 6, Leonard Allen; Oct. 13, Pat Durden;

Programs: Sept. 29, Rotary District 6250 Governor; Oct. 6, Club Assembly; Oct. 13, Michael Anderson, UW Health Organ Donor Program; Oct. 20, Benjamin Lick, new Greater Madison BMX Track; Oct. 27, Natalie Dresen, Waunakee Food Pantry.

Greeters: Sept. 29, Becky Ohan and Linda Olson; Oct. 6, Danny Paul and Ken Pesik; Oct. 13, Robert Pulvermacher and Tom Reis; Oct. 20, Troy Salisbury and Ellen Schaaf; Oct. 27, Todd Schmidt and James Schmitz.