

## Dan Martinson: "Winners Never Quit..."

### ...AND QUITTERS NEVER WIN."

So says Dan Martinson, owner of Northland Screw Products and this issue's feature personality. This story took me to Saint Francis, MN, to the land of the 6-spindle screw machine. I *had* to meet Dan Martinson: as of January 4, 2007, Martinson will have been in the manufacturing business for 50 years. His company's 30th anniversary is that same month – a very impressive “two-fer” in any career.

Northland Screw Products is a precision manufacturer, both machining and assembly, with additional processes of centerless buffing and grinding. Its specialty is running 12-foot bars through 6-spindle auto screw machines. With a regional client base, Northland's products closely reflect the environment: outdoor motors, guns, bow and arrow parts and more. As Martinson says, “if it weren't for the sportsman, we'd be in big trouble.”

Born and raised in Lake Netta, population 50, Martinson represents the generation of a “one-room schoolhouse.” His family experiences feel familiar: rural community, hardworking father and grandfather in the building contractor business, mom at home with three children, learning from a young age how to work hard. In grade school, Martinson's family moved to Anoka where he lived until adulthood.

How did Martinson get into manufacturing? He did it the old fashioned way...he married into it! Well, maybe not technically...but there's a story here somewhere. In Anoka, the Martinson family moved next door to Les Cass and his family, of Cass Screw Machine. Cass just happened to have a beautiful daughter by the name of Moneen, who caught Martinson's eye at the sweet age of 13. Together they grew up and ultimately married in 1962 when they both were 21 years old. Truth be told, Dan and Moneen took their junker car up to Pine City for a private ceremony witnessed only by the pastor and his family, suffered five flat tires on their way to a weekend honeymoon in Duluth, before moving back home to Anoka and into a home Martinson had bought for his bride-to-be.

Martinson's work record – as an employee – is not what one would call

Dan Martinson pictured in front of a small portion of a mural that stretches the entire of the wall.



“stellar.” In fact, he assured me that he “stinks as an employee.” To illustrate, from 1971 to 1974, Martinson worked at various machine shops. . . . *31 jobs in three years*, to be exact. During his last tenure as an employee, working in a machine shop, he quit three times and was fired twice. Finally he landed on the idea that, just perhaps, he should run his own company. And so it was that, in 1977, in a pole barn on his land along the Rum River, Northland Screw Products was born.

I know I am preaching to the choir here, but I will say it anyway: starting a business is hard. Just plain hard. And, unfortunately, Martinson's timing was not so good. In the early 1980's, interest rates were over 20%, the economy was sluggish, Martinson actually experienced one stretch of seventeen weeks without a paycheck. At the risk of repeating myself - it was just plain hard. And yet, the sheer force of his determination and hard work produced results. From 1977 to 2006, Martinson moved his business into a Saint Francis grocery store, and ultimately added on to make his current 30,000 square foot facility.

“This is not the kind of business where you get in and get out. You build a rapport over years and years. Then, once we finally earn an order, we've got a customer who stays with us. As far as screw machine companies go, we still are the new kids on the block, and are continuing to have to earn our business” says Martinson.

“This is a tight community. Your word needs to be good – and it is, just ask my grandsons.” Martinson is intensely proud of his immediate family as well as the family consisting of his employees. He recognizes the responsibility to support his community, and takes it quite seriously. His children are carrying on the tradition. He's got three children, two of whom run much of the business today. His older son, Rob, has been working at the company since he was 13 years old. He was the first son in the family to complete high school. His younger brother, James, also in the family business, was the first to complete college. As the company continues to do well, Martinson and Moneen – her friends call her “Butch” – are spending just a bit more time riding motorcycle, going to their lake home, and spending time with grandchildren.

What message should be read between the lines of Martinson's experiences and stories? I read a story about persistence, about never quitting, about standing up for personal ethics. I read about a man who takes life and his work ethic very seriously, because living right is serious business. “The Lord hates cowards,” asserts Martinson, talking to his grandsons, “so don't you ever be a quitter.” – PM

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