

FAR-FLUNG families

SOME FAMILY BUSINESSES HAVE LEFT THE CORNER STORE FAR BEHIND.

By William Poe

The Harbison father and son team might be found inspecting a manufacturing plant in Montreal. Members of the Schaeffer clan can be seen selling oil and other lubricants to farmers, truckers and racecar drivers virtually anywhere in the U.S.; and the Renard family and its paper products can be found throughout the region.

If it seems that mom and pop just won't stay in the corner store any longer, you could blame Nicholas Schaeffer, who is said to be St. Louis' first millionaire. Schaeffer's "Black Beauty" grease in the mid-1800s coated the wheels of Conestoga wagons rolling west with pioneers and his company's Red Engine Oil lubricated the power plants of steamboats that later plied the far reaches of the Mississippi, Missouri and Ohio rivers.



Schaeffer Manufacturing Company (left to right): Rich Niedbalski, Bill Schaeffer Herrmann, John Schaeffer Shields, Tom Schaeffer Herrmann, Jill Schaeffer Niedbalski, Jay Schaeffer Shields

From the time Schaeffer founded his axle grease company in St. Louis in 1839, he apparently eyed far-away markets. Some old handwritten ledgers from the mid-1800s, for instance, show that two young soap brokers named Procter and Gamble in Cincinnati were Schaeffer customers.

Today, Schaeffer Manufacturing Company still has its headquarters near the Mississippi at 102 Barton Street, and is still run by the Schaeffer family. The company has 10 warehouse facilities throughout the U.S. and 400 salespeople selling more than \$50 million each year in various oils, greases and fuel additives.



Schaeffer products include various oils, greases and fuel additives.

"We're now pretty strong across the entire nation," says Jay Schaeffer Shields, chief operating officer and great-great grandson of the founder. "We hope to go to \$100 million in sales by 2010."

Helping the company strive for that milestone are other family members John Schaeffer Shields, chairman of the board; Tom Schaeffer Herrmann, president; Bill Schaeffer Herrmann, vice president of production; Jill Schaeffer Niedbalski, quality assurance manager; Rich Niedbalski, a plant manager, and Jamie Duke, director of corporate sales.

"We have a lot of good people," says Jay Schaeffer Shields. "It's not just family. But we do think it is important to be able to say that we are a family business."

Family members abound, too, at Renard Paper Company. Inside the company's 100,000-square-foot office and distribution center in midtown St. Louis, founder Henri E. Renard still presides as chairman of the board. Day-to-day operations are primarily in the hands of son, David, who serves as president. Two of David's brothers, Paul and John, also hold executive positions. But that's not all. David's sisters, Martha and Lucy, also are with the company. But that's still not all. Henri Renard's niece, Peggy Droege, and granddaughter, Melissa, work for the company, too.



Renard Paper Company family, (left to right): John Renard, Martha Renard-Hamilton, Dave Renard, Lucy Renard-Gubauer, Melissa Renard, Paul Renard

Founded in 1953 as a disposable paper products company, the Renard company has over the years added depth and breadth to its product assortment with food service products; floor and carpet care equipment, and janitorial and industrial chemicals and supplies. The company has also greatly expanded its geographical reach.

"In the beginning, Henri wore all of the hats," says David Renard. "He'd make the sale at the front door and then deliver the product to the back door."

Now, the company, which this year is celebrating its 50th Anniversary, has 50 employees and distributes its products throughout the region.

Compared to 50-year-old Renard Paper line and 164-year-old Schaeffer Manufacturing, the family-run Harbison Corporation is a newborn business. Founded in 1992, Harbison, which operates as Pretium Packaging, is a Clayton-based manufacturer of custom plastic packaging for various institutional and consumer products, including Neutrogena's personal care goods.

Headed by Keith Harbison, president, and Earle H. Harbison Jr., chairman, Pretium molds plastic bottles and containers in nine U.S. and Canadian manufacturing plants from Montreal to Anaheim. Earle Harbison, Keith's father, is the former president of Monsanto Company. Adding his expertise to corporate decision-making is Keith Harbison's father-in-law, Ted Wetterau, who built the food distribution company that for years bore his name.



Harbison (left to right): Earl H. Harbison Jr., Keith S. Harbison

“We have a lot of expertise sitting on the board,” says Keith Harbison, who helped establish ComLink 21, the former long-distance company, in the mid-1980s. “But we also have a first-rate management team spread throughout the country. Authority is not centralized in the St. Louis office, but rather granted to people in the field.”

Clearly, all three companies benefit from family ties and the succession of generations.

Jay Schaeffer Shields notes that **Schaeffer Manufacturing** might have been sold in the early 1980s when the deaths of two principals rocked the company. Only then was **Jay’s** father, **John**, a **Schaeffer** stockholder who had a successful outside career with IBM and an insurance company, and **Jaqueline Schaeffer Herrmann**, his sister, prompted to join the family business.

“If Dad and Jackie had not stepped in, the company would have been sold,” says son, **Jay**.

Jay also credits non-family members with doubling company sales in the last decade.

“We pay market-level salaries to get the best performing people we can,” **Shields** says. “And there is room to advance. When it comes to management, we say we would like it to be a family member, but it can just as easily be a non-family employee.”

At Harbison Corp., Keith Harbison says the company benefits greatly from the business backgrounds of his father and father-in-law.

“We have a tremendous amount of business experience, but not necessarily in plastics,” Harbison says. “Dad had a general knowledge of plastics, but was no expert, while Ted brought manufacturing and distribution experience.”



Harbison, which operates as Pretium Packaging, molds plastic bottles and containers.

That is not to minimize Keith Harbison's operations and business financing acumen, as he has grown the company through 11 targeted acquisitions. Pretium is now the 20th largest blow molder in the country and is in the top dozen in its niche product categories, Harbison adds.

And it was Keith Harbison who envisioned the company that became Pretium.

"I wanted to start a business in a fragmented industry, like long distance telephone service was in the 1980s," Harbison says. "But I wanted an industry with assets behind it."

Harbison found his first packaging asset with the purchase of a small plastic molds company in Hermann, Mo., and he found assets of a different sort right within his own family. The Schaeffers and the Renards can say the same.

William V. Poe is principal of Poe Communications, a St. Louis advertising and marketing communications firm.

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