

Weldon Gullickson – K-W Manufacturing

This is Kansas Profile. I'm Ron Wilson, director of the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development at Kansas State University.

“Nice threads.” In the 1970s, that was a slang phrase that a person would use to compliment someone’s clothes. Now a “thread” refers to a line of discussion on social media. But today we are referring to a totally different kind of thread: The kind that goes on a metal rod to hold things together, such as nuts and bolts. Those threaded fasteners are at the core of an entrepreneurial business in rural Kansas. It’s today’s Kansas Profile.

Weldon Gullickson is owner of K-W Manufacturing which produces various kinds of threaded fasteners. Weldon is a native Kansan, having been born at Horton. His wife Margaret grew up near Everest.

After a stint in the U.S. Air Force, Weldon went to work for a bolt and nut distributing company in Kansas City. He enjoyed the work and was offered the opportunity to open a distributorship for the company in Dallas. After several years in Texas, he and Margaret returned to northeast Kansas where he had a long career in the bolt and nut sales business.

By 1991, Weldon was ready to retire, but he wanted to keep himself active. He decided to try to produce specialty bolts and nuts himself. He opened a small shop in his garage and launched the business. He named it K-W Manufacturing, using the initials of himself and his youngest son Kevin.

K-W Manufacturing began to grow, and it soon outgrew Weldon’s garage. He rented space in the nearby town of Everest. The company continued to expand.

Today, K-W Manufacturing in Everest produces a host of threaded fasteners. The company facility has grown from Weldon’s garage to include three industrial buildings covering 22,000 square feet of manufacturing and steel storage space.

K-W Manufacturing produces square and round U-bolts, stud bolts, eye bolts, spade bolts, anchor bolts, hook bolts, J-bolts and more. The company also makes a variety of specialized welded parts, utilizing the MIG welding process. It can do various metal bending and threading operations, utilizing coarse, fine, or acme thread type. The company works with both ferrous and non-ferrous materials and various types of surface finishes.

Mechanical plating is K-W Manufacturing’s most recent initiative. This is not the process which uses chemicals and acids, but rather a mechanical process to strengthen the metal. “One of our customers was using high alloy bolts that came from overseas, but the heads kept popping off,” Weldon said. K-W’s mechanical plating on the bolts solved the problem.

“Almost all our parts go into farm implements,” Weldon said. “They might be anything that is bent or threaded or fastened.” For example, their fasteners go into tillage equipment, grain bins, irrigation equipment, or all kinds of other items. “Our products are found in any ag state, primarily in the Midwest, but we go as far west as Idaho,” Weldon said. The company has grown through word of mouth. “Farm equipment manufacturers can relate to a family-owned company,” Weldon said.

K-W Manufacturing remains a family business. Weldon and Margaret’s grandson Dustin joined the company shortly after graduating college. In January 2012, their

youngest son Kevin (the very same one for which the company had been named 21 years ago) joined the company also. He now serves as company manager.

Weldon and Margaret have been married for 66 years. He also serves as a lay preacher for various churches in the region. "One church asked me to be a temporary preacher while they were looking for a pastor," Weldon said. "I ended up being their pastor for 13 years."

Weldon enjoys the rural lifestyle. Everest is a town of 311 people. Now, that's rural.

"We go back to visit friends in Kansas City every so often, and I hate to sit in those Kansas City traffic jams," he said. "Our people are good, disciplined workers. I love our people," Weldon said.

"Nice threads." No, I'm not referring to clothes or social media. I'm referring to metal threaded fasteners. We commend Weldon Gullickson and all those involved with K-W Manufacturing for making a difference with hard work and entrepreneurship.

Weldon enjoys the big picture, but he also still enjoys the nuts and bolts.

For the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development, this is Ron Wilson with Kansas Profile.