

# A HISTORY OF SUCCESS

## Early SWIF Loan Client Palm Industries Continues Making an Impact



*Harlan and Jerri Palm, Grove City*

Some people just have it – a spark – for business. Here in southwest Minnesota, we know there are plenty of people with a passionate, entrepreneurial spirit. Harlan Palm of Grove City has that spark. He's leaving a legacy in Minnesota's manufacturing industry after many years and successes with multiple companies through Palm Industries.

"I'm 80 years old, and I'm as excited about it today as I was the day I got into it," said Harlan speaking of the manufacturing industry. "You either hate this business or love it."

Born in 1931 six miles north of Grove City, Harlan is a self-proclaimed gear head—which he says is "a generic name for people who can't leave things alone." For as long as Harlan can remember, he was always tinkering with things—he even put motors on bicycles.

At age 20, he joined the Naval Aviation and served in Central America during the Korean War. When he returned, Harlan worked at a company contracted to maintain 3M's private planes. In 1957, during a night of dancing in St. Paul, Harlan met Jerri. A year later, the newly-married couple was moving back to Grove City, where Harlan's parents wanted him to help run the farm.

After about two years of farming, Harlan started heading down a different path as a salesman for agricultural equipment. One of his first endeavors in manufacturing became Cozy Cabs, which made cabs that could be attached to tractors, making them more comfortable and safe.

"The timing couldn't have been better for that product," Harlan recalls. "The farmers were ready to get out of that dust

and dirt."

Cabs were later made for machining, and lawn and garden equipment. At the recommendation of a dealer, they also started making cabs for construction equipment. Timing was right for this endeavor, too, just as OSHA was mandating roll-over protection systems, which Cozy Cab could provide.

In 1970, Harlan started Palm Industries, and has since been involved in various ventures and spin-off companies, made grain bins and trailers and continued farming, even though it was "way down on the list of priorities," he said.

Jerri was part of the business, too. She worked as a bookkeeper, raised their four children and was involved with their church and community. "I always enjoyed being in business with Harlan," she said.

They eventually purchased a building in Litchfield, in addition to the manufacturing space on their family farm. Always the idea man, Harlan's company changed and grew—and that's where SWIF came in.

By the late 1980s, Harlan had an opportunity to expand because of a deal with the Bobcat Company. Palm Attachments received one of SWIF's earliest loans from the Revolving Loan Fund in 1988 to add onto the Litchfield plant. At that time, they had about 20 employees; today, more than 200.

"It really brought Bobcat, a global company, to Meeker County," said SWIF President/CEO Sherry Ristau. "Manufacturing has been good to southwest Minnesota. Many great minds like Harlan's are doing great things for our region, including creating jobs."

The Palms are very proud of creating good jobs in their community. Jerri noted that it wasn't just his salesmanship, but also Harlan's management and treating his employees well that built a good reputation.

"I've got guys who worked for me 30 years ago who are still good friends," Harlan said. "It's been a very fun business. It didn't even seem like work."

Harlan sees a passion for business has been passed on to his family and notes seeing a familiar spark in some of his grandchildren. Daughter Janelle Johnson is CFO at one of their companies, Towmasters, in Litchfield.

As part of SWIF's history, their impact will be seen on our region's economy for many years to come.