

Bretting Manufacturing honored

2015 BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

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For 125 years, the C.G. Bretting Manufacturing Company has been an Ashland Industrial leader. With their 400 employees, 280,000 square feet of plant space and a worldwide reputation for cutting edge technology and unmatched quality, Bretting is marking five generations of the Bretting family in its history.

It is little wonder then that the company is the only firm in the 34-year history of the Ashland Area Development Corporation's (AADC) annual naming of "Business of the Year" recipients to ever repeat in winning that award.

"Throughout their 125-year history, the firm has demonstrated an uncommon ability to adapt to market changes, to be able not only survive, but to thrive," said AADC Board President Matt Crowell. "They are a stellar example of a business that is forward thinking and innovative, a business with a long-term view."

Crowell said that Bretting had long been noted for being a business that is devoted to the Ashland community.

"Most of us in this room are aware of the company's tremendous positive impact not only on its employees but on our community throughout the years," he said.

Crowell said although the firm certainly deserved public accolades for its generosity, it was not a company that sought recognition for its many good works and charitable gifts.

"This is a business which has incorporated a charitable mindset and ethical conduct into its business model making it a it an instrumental part of its day-to-day operation essential to reaching long-term success," he said.

Crowell noted that the Business of the Year award was made based on a number of criteria, including a high level of commitment as demonstrated by capital investment in its business, employees and the community as well as business strength and stability, its commitment to the county, its natural resources, charitable giving and ethical conduct.

"This exceptional company unquestionably meets all these criteria and is held in the highest regard, representative of the very best business owners, those who quietly grow a successful business," he said.

The award was made in the form of a large brass plaque, lovingly machined by Bretting employees secretly for the presentation, which occurred amid a standing ovation by the crowd attending the event.

The presentation was followed by a proclamation read by Ashland Mayor Debra Lewis, who said she wanted to express her "utmost gratitude" for all of the contributions made by the Bretting family over the years.

"C. G. Bretting Manufacturing has been a major contributor to the both the economy and welfare of the city of Ashland and surrounding area," read Lewis in her proclamation recognizing the company and its owners. "The citizens of Ashland extend their gratitude and thanks for the exceptional effort they have put forth in our community as they are recognized today as the 2015 Business of the year in Ashland, Wisconsin."

Wisconsin Lieutenant Governor Rebecca Kleefisch, representing governor Scott Walker to present a certificate of achievement, said the selection of Bretting was one that was well deserved, calling their history "another incredible Wisconsin accomplishment." She praised Bretting Manufacturing for their enlightened employee policies.

"In a family business, when you extend the definition of family to your employees, it is a very special and unique thing," she said. "It made me proud to tour this company, and it made me even prouder that they had experienced such tremendous growth.

"It is families like the Bretchings that make Wisconsin great."

She noted that Wisconsin's exports had expanded to \$23.4 billion dollars.

"Wisconsin companies like Bretting are earning us a magnificent, worldwide reputation."

Making a presentation of behalf of the Wisconsin State legislature was State Senator Janet Bewley, who noted that State representative Beth Meyers had been at the celebration earlier but had to leave for Madison to attend a meeting.

"So I have the privilege of representing her and all of the people of the legislature in offering our congratulations to you all," she said.

Bewley praised the Bretting women, including Jane Bretting, the widow of founder Christopher Bretting, when he died in 1905, operating the company with just the assistance of her 17-year-old son. She also recognized the accomplishments of Barbara Bretting, wife of Tad Bretting whose accomplishments and contributions to the community were many and deeply valued.

"All of you who knew Barbara was "Whew! Could that woman work!" And did that woman work!" she exclaimed.

Bewley then recognized the wives of David and Paul Bretting, Rebecca and Terri Bretting.

"I know that you play no small part in the success of this wonderful company," she said.

Bewley praised the Bretting commitment to the community, its stability and its flexibility and ability to change with the times.

"They are going to constantly be here for us and their employees," she said. "This is a company of incredible value."

U.S. Senator Ron Johnson's representative Amy Resop said Johnson congratulated the firm and praised "your willingness to take a risk, your responsiveness to a dynamic marketplace and your dedication to unsurpassed customer service."

Resop said the firm helped to build the Ashland business base and helped drive the state's business success.

Seventh District Congressman Sean Duffy's representative Craig Rosand said, reading from a letter sent by Duffy, that C.G. Bretting was to be commended for their efforts.

"I know how important C.G. Bretting Manufacturing is to the Ashland Community," the letter read. "I also know how Bretting quietly gives to the community in numerous ways without seeking attention. I also know that you will continue to contribute to this great country through your involvement in the Ashland community. It is companies like C.G. Bretting Manufacturing that really make a difference."

In remarks for Bretting Manufacturing, David Bretting told the audience that it was the firm's employees that really made the difference.

"I know you hear that all the time, I know you heard that from my dad, but they really do," he said.
"They come from all over, from Washburn, Bayfield, Ironwood, Hurley.

"Paul and I would not choose any other work force than the one we have. Long-term, dedicated, many of them are here today, they have been with us for 10, 20 30, some of them have been with us for over 40 years, and we are pretty dang lucky."

Bretting noted that manufacturing accounted for 21 percent of the state's private sector economy.

"We export in 2015 21.8 billion dollars, which is 94.6 billion dollars of our total state exports," he said.

Bretting said his firm was lucky to have resources like WITC and the Ashland School District, as well as Memorial Medical Center and Northland College.

"Right down to the Pizza Pub, which serves as a mealtime for thousands every year at Bretting Manufacturing," he said. "These businesses play a huge role in our successes and we are lucky to have them in our community.

"We live and work in the best part of the state, our employees are so dedicated, and would do almost anything to satisfy our customer base."