

Getting the mix just right

By Ron Wilson
Huck Boyd Institute

Getting the mix just right. That's vital, whether one is a cook, a chemist, a cattle feeder, a basketball team – or a business. Today we meet a Kansas company which has become a national leader in making mixers for livestock feed and more.

Mike Hilderbrand is president of Roto-Mix, a company with deep roots in rural Kansas. Mike has degrees from Southern Illinois University, Keller Graduate School, and a certificate in management from Harvard, plus years of experience in manufacturing. In 2011 he became president of Roto-Mix.

The company's beginnings go back to Ben Neier, who was farming in the 1950s near the rural community of Mullinville, population 267 people. Now, that's rural. Ben started a feedlot and was looking for a better way to mix feed.

"Nutrition of feeder cattle is very important," Mike said. "Or maybe Ben just got tired of shoveling feed."

Anyway, Ben Neier devised an auger system for mixing feed for his cattle. It worked very well. He started a company and built a building in which to manufacture these mixers in Dodge City.

"It was the birth of an industry," Mike said. "Other companies followed his lead."

During the turbulent economic times of the 1970s, the company's ownership went through transitions. Ben Neier left the business. Then he learned about a British company that had a patent for a new type of mixer

which operated with a central rotor. He acquired the rights to this design and, with a friend named Bill Pullen, began a new company to manufacture these rotary mixers in 1984. The company would ultimately be named Roto-Mix.

In 1988, the company needed more manufacturing space and bought a building in Dodge City. Ben Neier knew the building well. It was the very same building where he had begun manufacturing his auger mixers two decades previously. The business continued to grow. Ben's son Rod Neier joined the company and became CEO in 2011, when Mike Hilderbrand was recruited as president.

Roto-Mix is a leader in the manufacturing of processing and mixing equipment for beef cattle and dairy feeding, plus waste disposal and compost mixing operations. "Our focus from the beginning was beef cattle feedlots and that is our core business," Mike said. "Now we are growing our business in the dairy cattle industry, which requires new products because of the high hay content of their ration. Interestingly, that has had extra benefits because those products are also attractive to cow-calf producers."

Another element of the company's business is the compost mixing operations. "This is the green side of our business," Mike said. As more state and local governments and others do increased recycling, this segment of the Roto-Mix business has grown. "Our mixers can take almost any kind of organic scraps or waste and mix into

compost," he said. For example, a pair of Roto-Mix machines was recently placed in Los Angeles.

In addition to the plant in Dodge City, the company has locations in Scott City and Hoisington. Back in the 1990s, Roto-Mix contracted with the city of Hoisington and remodeled an old railroad building into a manufacturing facility. "It has the tall ceilings which we need for our equipment," Mike said. "We were able to save a 100-year-old building and generate 50 jobs."

Roto-Mix has grown to 125 employees. The company's products are sold coast to coast and to 38 countries. The company was even named the Kansas Exporter of the Year. More information can be found at www.rotomix.com.

"This company knows its customers very well," Mike said. "We have a core of long-term employees. We manufacture our products with high efficiency, but we've also tried to remain something of a job shop so we can customize products to meet customer needs. This is American manufacturing at its best."

Getting the mix just right. That's vital for success. We commend the Neier family, more recently Mike Hilderbrand, and all those involved with Roto-Mix for making a difference by building a business with high quality mixing equipment. In the discussion of the best manufacturers in Kansas, this company is definitely in the mix.

Post-prom fun!



After prom is all said and done, to keep the kids in a safe environment they hold a post-prom. At post-prom they have many games and prizes. Pictured are Neysa Carlson and Molly Scott leg wrestling.

-Telegram photo by Dana Paxton

HANSEN MUSEUM

Dane G. Hansen Museum, Logan, is proud to present "Earth and Loom: A Century of Native American Art" scheduled to open May 16 and run through July 13. This exhibit will consist of 20 Navajo weavings dating from the late 19th century to contemporary. They represent different regions and weaving styles over the past century. Also in the exhibit,

will be 26 pieces of pueblo pottery representing the work of many significant Native American potters from nine different pueblos. This pottery also dates from the late 19th century to contemporary.

This exhibition is the private collection of Dennis and Carola Deschner of Phillipsburg. They started collecting nearly 30 years ago by accident when

they bought a Navajo weaving in Colorado. They continued to find pieces as they travelled and fell in love with Southwestern art, basketry, and pueblo pottery.

For more information call Dane G. Hansen Museum at 785-689-4846 or check our web www.hansenmuseum.org.

Whitney

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-the dates for City-wide spring clean-up will be April 21-23.

-yard waste pick up will begin Wednesday.

-approved the request from Early Head Start to allow the use of Elmwood Park for Big Truck Night on April 24, at 5:30 p.m.

-will allow Northwest Kansas Library System to add doors and walls to make additional office spaces.

-accepted the formal second reading of Ordinance #1654,

restricting vehicle parking and mandating certain handicap parking on the west side of the 100 block of N. Kansas Ave. within the City of Norton.

-waived the formal second reading of Ordinance #1655, adopting a net metering policy; establishing a policy regarding customer-owned renewable energy resources, providing interconnection standards; providing a severability clause; providing for the repeal of ordinances in conflict; and providing an effective date; all within the City of Norton, and waive the formal reading of Exhibits A and B.

-amended Article 4-3 of the Personnel Rules to clarify that new employees who complete their probationary period halfway through the year will only receive one discretionary day for the remainder of that year.

-amended Article 4-5 of the Personnel Rules regarding Donation of Sick Leave Credits, by eliminating the sentence which states the maximum donation that an employee may receive in a 12 month period of time is 120 hours total.

-amended Article 5-11 of the Personnel Rules regarding Kansas Commercial Driver's

License, by eliminating the sentence which states if a current employee does not have a Kansas Class B CDL with air brakes and tanker endorsement, they will obtain said CDL within six months of Sept. 1, 2010; and add that an employee may only be exempted from the CDL requirement with approval by the City Council.

-will follow the definition of Safety Sensitive Positions in Appendix I of the Personnel Rules, and eliminate all other city employees from the Random Drug Testing Pool.

-the city general sales tax

receipts collected in February of 2014 totaled \$24,547.58, the city pool sales tax receipts totaled \$36,821.36, and the county sales tax receipts totaled \$18,565.40 for a total of \$79,934.34. The 2014 year to date sales tax receipts total \$209,102.62.

-accepted the low bid from Foley Equipment Company of Colby, of \$105,167 for a 2014 Caterpillar 924K Wheel Loader, which includes an optional 5-year warranty and a discount for the trade-in of the City's existing loader.

-approved the low bid from

First State Bank for a 5-year lease purchase agreement to finance \$90,000 at 3.13 percent interest.

-approved the March 17, 2014, council meeting minutes as written.

-approved Appropriating Ordinance #7.

The following building permits were presented:

Jim Broeckelman - \$500, re-roof and construct addition to garage at 210 W. Wilberforce

Brenda Sanders - \$1,800, install egress windows at 708 N. Norton

Sander

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Hays State University to help with his bookkeeping.

"They simplified my life."

They helped him implement QuickBooks accounting software which gives him the ability to run reports and manage

accounts more closely.

"There's a lot of challenges in owning a small town business, but being able to live in a small town and successfully operate a new business is really quite satisfying," Brad said.

The Sanders are always at

their store working. Kim works the front and Brad works the back of the store.

"If we were here for five years I would have said great, but to be here 10 years is incredible," Kim said. "The community supports us very well."

The Sanders said that they didn't know if they deserved the award but their secret to success is simple.

"Being honest and offering consistent good service has helped us build a rapport with our customers."



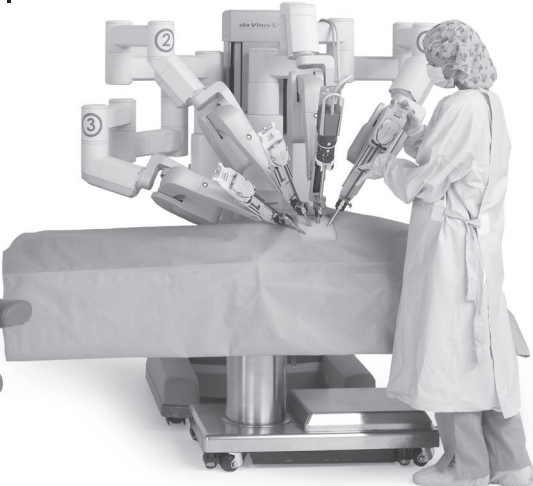
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