

# PROGRESS

## Grand Lake Region Growth Stories

### Part 3

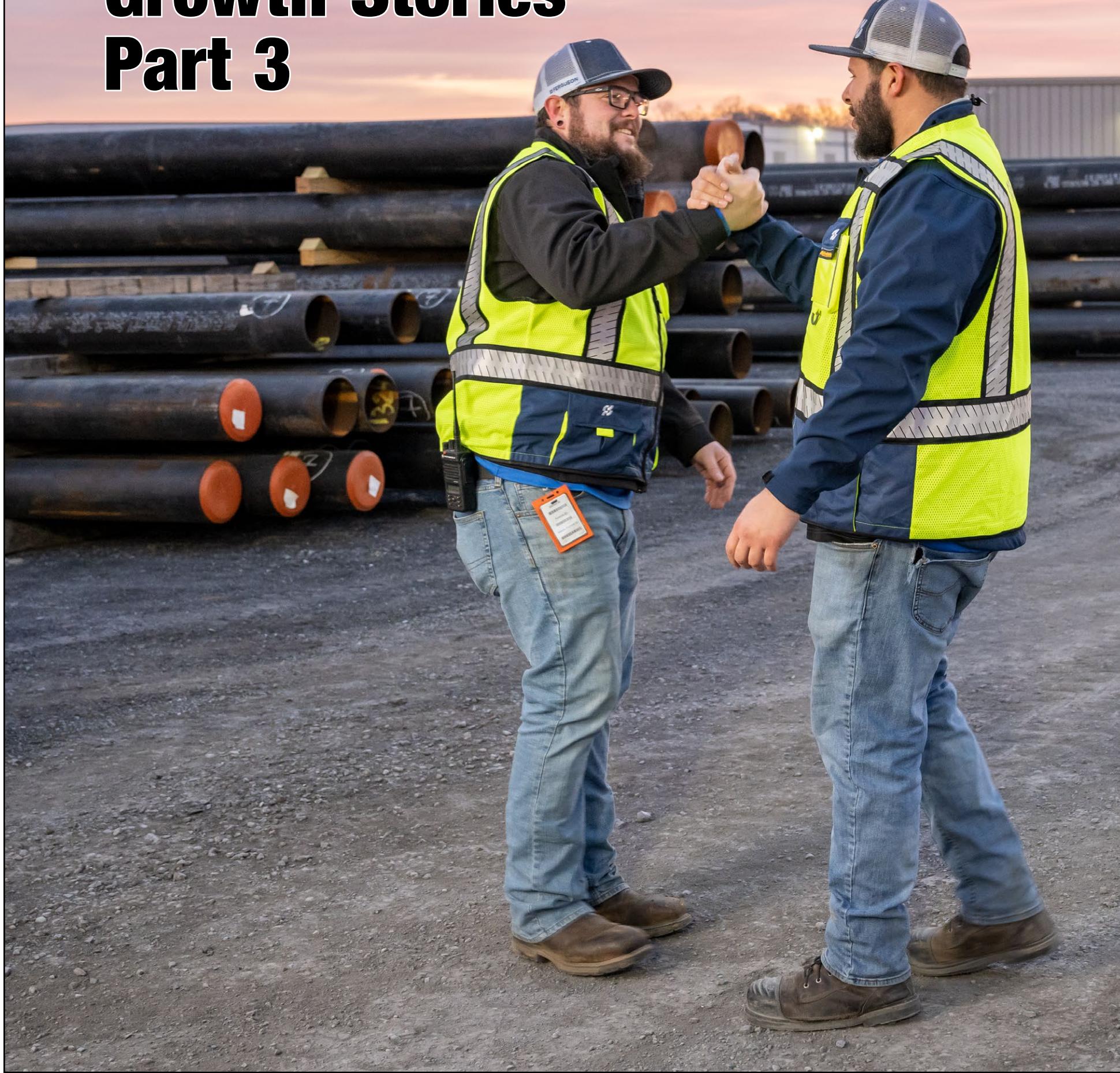


Photo submitted

Above, Ferguson Enterprises, which operates a distribution center and pipe yard at the intersection of State Route 29 and Harris Road, considers its workforce to be its greatest asset. Below, workers put the final touches on the steelwork at the Grand Event Center, Mercer County Fairgrounds.

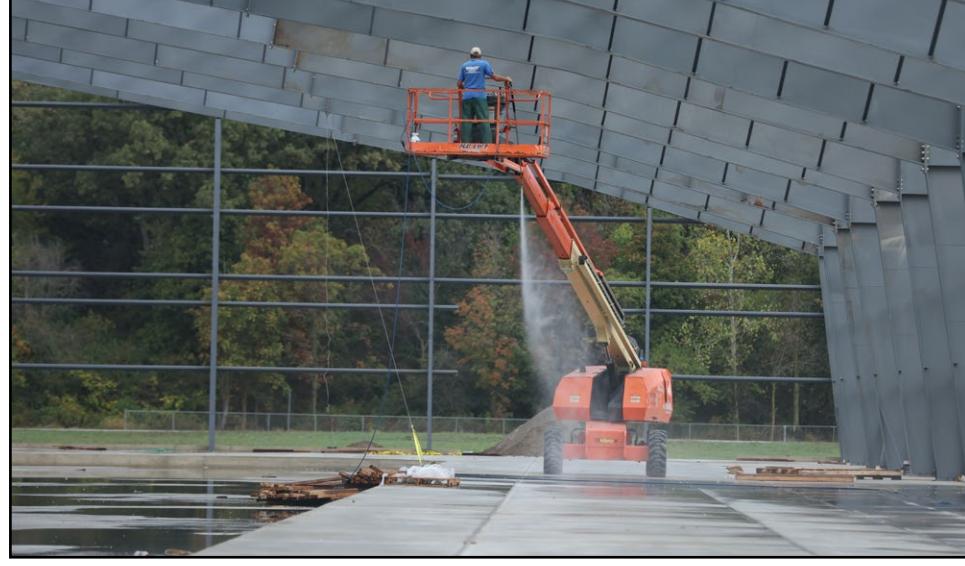
## Think small in a big way

The first thing readers will notice about our annual PROGRESS supplement this year is that we've divided it into four smaller weekly sections, instead of two large sections. PROGRESS parts 1-4 are being published in consecutive weeks on Jan. 23, Jan. 30, Feb. 6 and Feb. 13.

That's symbolic in two ways. First, we're trying something new — looking to improve the product for our readers, our advertisers and our own production process. Trying something new, of course, is a linchpin of community and economic progress, from individual entrepreneurs making innovations to businesses expanding to new markets to governments and educational institutions adapting to historical change.

Second, four smaller sections reflect the granular and multifaceted nature of economic growth and community development.

Over time, developers and governing officials, particularly in smaller municipalities and rural



Paige Sutter/ The Daily Standard

communities, have realized that good growth rarely comes through landing that one giant manufacturer or technology firm. Instead, the healthiest development for rural areas is usually organic, growing out of the "soil" of the place, as it were.

This kind of progress leverages existing internal assets and thrives when many rich nutrients come together:

a talented workforce, strong families, support for education, cultural heritage, health care, infrastructure, business-friendly governance, manufacturing, technology, agriculture and more.

"Successful economic development is rarely about the one big thing. More likely, it is about lots of little things working synergistically together in a plan that

makes sense," wrote Edward T. McMahon of the Urban Land Institute a few years ago.

Look closely at this year's four sections of PROGRESS, and you'll find dozens of the "little" pieces that work together to make progress happen in the Grand Lake region.

Consider how small, longtime operations like Maria Stein Grain, Davis Campers and The Willow restaurant become

intertwined with a rural community's families, culture, tax base and quality of life. Or how Midmark, Ferguson, Thieman Tailgates and Armcorp highlight the continuing importance of manufacturing and building in the Grand Lake region's economic base. Or how the new Grand Event Center at Mercer County Fairgrounds (featured in Part 4) serves as a beacon of local farm culture, community support and future progress.

In Part 1, we also highlighted the work of the area's chambers of commerce, which are all about cultivating synergy among the many players and forces in the business ecosystem. At a profoundly local level, they build spaces for networking, offer unique marketing and training opportunities and develop tomorrow's community leaders.

They help all of us think small — and think local — in a big way. Progress is sure to follow.

— Jerry Martin  
Managing Editor

**THE DAILY STANDARD**  
Feb. 6, 2026

## Ferguson Enterprises

# Finding a sweet spot in Mercer Co.

Facility is Midwest hub of 'world-class' supply chain

By WILLIAM KINCAID  
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CELINA — Since opening its doors in June 2014, plumbing supply giant Ferguson Enterprises' distribution center at the intersection of State Route 29 and Harris Road has undergone significant growth, enlarging its physical presence, the number of products it handles and its workforce.

It's one of Ferguson's nine regional distribution centers, which together supply about 150,000 different types of products and employ roughly 1,500 associates throughout its network, according to Dan Larmore, a general manager with the company, which is the largest value-added distributor in the \$340 billion residential and non-residential construction market.

Ferguson provides expertise and a wide range of products and services, from plumbing, HVAC, appliances and lighting to PVF, water and wastewater solutions and more. It considers its associates as the driving force of the business.

The distribution centers "are the heart of the Ferguson supply chain network and give us a key competitive advantage in the wholesale distribution industry," according to the company's website.

The Celina distribution center's meteoric rise mirrors that of Ferguson, which in June announced its debut on the Fortune 500 list, where it earned the 146th position on the 2025 edition of Fortune magazine's ranking of the nation's largest companies.

Originally opened in June 2014 as a 350,000-square-foot warehouse with 60 to 70 employees, the Celina distribution center expanded its warehouse by 200,000 square feet after just 15 months in operation.

In 2017, Ferguson used over 17 acres of land adjacent to the distribution center to construct a pipe yard operation, a \$13 million investment that brought



Submitted photo

## Ferguson's Celina distribution center handles 55,000 different types of products.

more than a dozen additional full-time jobs. The pipe yard in Celina enables Ferguson to distribute pipe quickly to locations and customers in the Midwest.

Today, the twin operations employ 150 associates, mostly from Mercer and Auglaize counties, Larmore said.

"Celina and Mercer County are very responsive to any needs that we have, especially when it comes to facilities. So we talk on a regular basis, so it's been very responsive," he said. "And as far as the workforce is concerned, we do not really have a big issue with turnover or filling the positions. So that's been really nice, too, compared to other facilities."

### Ferguson comes to Ohio

On June 4, 2014, Ferguson's Celina distribution center rolled out the red carpet for state and local officeholders and other dignitaries, among them erstwhile Gov. John

Kasich, who marveled at the company's more than \$15 million investment in the site.

The sprawling facility was the first distribution center built by Ferguson in the Midwest and serves company branches and customers in seven surrounding states.

"The community sold itself and here they (Ferguson) are," Kasich told The Daily Standard following an official ribbon-cutting ceremony at the then 350,000-square-foot facility.

The governor credited local residents and community leaders for luring the business that, at the time, had already hired 65 people, the majority from the Grand Lake region.

"Well, for one, the people, I think the people (in this area) are No. 1. Two, it's a good location," he said. "I mean we're business-friendly and the people get it and you put all that together and proof's in

the pudding."

Larmore echoed many of those sentiments when asked why Ferguson zeroed in on Mercer County.

"There were about 23 locations that were considered, and what really brought the distribution center to Celina was

the location," he said.

"Where we're located we can reach all of our branches that we service within a 24-hour point. So that was a big win for the Midwest."

Another key factor to the company's decision to lay roots in Celina was a ready workforce.

"We knew that we were going to be able to fill these positions fairly quickly and get the right management team into play," Larmore said.

"When we're looking at recruiting for this particular facility, this

See SUPPLY, page 3B

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Photo submitted

**The Celina distribution center maintains an excellent relationship with Crown Equipment Corporation. Fifty to 60 pieces of Crown equipment are used within the center.**

## Supply (From page 2B)

area has done a really good job of giving us the right folks in the right positions to make this facility one of the best of the network,"

### Daily operations

Ferguson considers its "world-class supply chain" to be among its core strengths. It connects with 37,000 suppliers and allows it to furnish 1 million customers with a broad range of products and services.

It deploys scale locally through a vast network of facilities and a fleet of vehicles for "final mile delivery." This extensive network, Ferguson asserts, places it within 60 miles of 95% of customers in North America.

"Our primary goal is to make sure that we're supplying product to our customers and to our branches, here at this distribution center and (with the) supply chain in general for us," Larmore said. "We want to make sure that we can get that product to them in a timely fashion."

The Celina distribution center's breadth of inventory is much larger than what it was at the time of its opening.

"There's just been a lot of growth in different areas like HVAC, and I would say Facilities Supplies is a big growth-like division for us," Larmore said. "We do have more than what we had before. We have about 55,000 different types of product in here."

For contractors working big jobs or plant supervisors facing a turnaround, or temporary halt, getting a part as quickly as possible is essential for resuming operations.

"If you're a contractor and you walk into a Ferguson branch and you order something before 5 p.m., we're able to have it at that branch the next day in the morning for them to pick up. So that's a huge win for a contractor," Larmore said. "If you're trying to close on a house or if you have a manufacturing facility that's shut down because they need a part, you can get it the next day."

"We're also able to hotshot things out here if we really need to where we have a carrier pick up and deliver the same day if they have a plant shut down."

### Dedicated workforce

Since commencing

operations in June 2014, the Celina distribution center has seen its number of associates rise from about 70 to 130. It has also added a third shift and weekend crew, Larmore noted.

In terms of highly valued skills, candidates with experience operating powered industrial trucks, or lift trucks, certainly have an edge.

"When you're looking at our area ... it's mainly manufacturing and not distribution centers. So we have a robust training program for those that need trained up on that equipment," Larmore said. "And just because you do not have the equipment experience doesn't mean you can't succeed within our facility."

Not surprisingly, Larmore said the Celina distribution center maintains an excellent relationship with Crown Equipment Corp., one of the world's largest material handling companies, whose global headquarters are in New Bremen. Crown's Celina manufacturing plant on Grand Lake Road is just a hop, skip and jump from the distribution center.

Larmore said 50 to 60 pieces of Crown equipment are used within the Celina distribution center.

"It's great having them right down the street. If we need a part, it's there, and the service level is fantastic, and the partnership is there, too," Larmore said. "There are times when Crown will come to us to test out equipment or maybe a different platform that they want to use. And then, obviously being the partners that we are, we will let them do that in here."

### Pipe yard

Ferguson built a multimillion-dollar pipe yard operation next to the Celina distribution center in 2018, expanding the company's network of pipe fabrication, pipe end cutting and preparation facilities.

The operation entails a 160,000-square-foot building and 6 acres of outdoor storage.

"The addition lets us carry a variety of large-diameter pipe and also fabricate," Ferguson senior director of communications and public relations Christine Dwyer said at the time.

The outfit supplies pipes to 100 Ferguson branches in 12 states, Larmore said.

Ferguson made a total investment of \$13.16

million in the project, \$10.9 million for the actual pipe yard operation, \$2.01 million for the purchase and installation of new machinery and equipment and \$250,000 for furniture and fixtures, according to company documents.

"We're also looking at big megaprojects out of those pipe yards. Data centers would be a good example of that. We supply product to (data centers), and that business just continues to grow for us," Larmore said.

The pipe yard started out with about 16 associates but now has 22 associates, with more expected to be brought on in the coming years.

### Ferguson today

Ferguson in June announced its debut on the Fortune 500 list, where it earned the 146th position on the 2025 edition of Fortune magazine's ranking of the nation's largest companies.

"This milestone reflects the company's impact on the North American construction industry and reinforces its position as the largest value-added distributor in its \$340 billion residential and non-residential construction markets," the company said in a news release.

The Fortune 500 list, published annually by Fortune magazine, ranks the top 500 U.S. companies by total revenue for their respective fiscal years. Ferguson earned its place on the list with revenues of \$29.6 billion in fiscal year 2024 and after completing a corporate restructuring that moved its headquarters to the U.S. in August 2024.

Headquartered in Newport News, Virginia, Ferguson trades on the New York Stock Exchange under the symbol FERG. Overall, Ferguson has roughly 35,000 associates in over 1,700 locations.

Should Ferguson wish to expand its presence even further in Mercer County, there's plenty of room to grow.

"We definitely own all the land between the pipe yard and the distribution center, and if we do continue to grow at the pace that we are on, expansion is definitely not off the table," Larmore said. "But it's not anything that's solidified today."

Ferguson made a total investment of \$13.16



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Now a cornerstone of American Rheinmetall's operations, the St. Marys plant continues its legacy of innovation and quality. Rheinmetall's recent acquisition of Loc Performance Products, LLC, a Michigan-based leader in track and mechanical systems, fabricated structures, and precision machined components, enhances the company's global capabilities and bolsters its rapidly expanding U.S. military vehicle business. The St. Marys facility plays a pivotal role in this growth, producing advanced rubber compounding solutions and manufacturing Trackman-branded products—renowned for their durability and performance in agriculture and construction applications.

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LIA

## Amcorp Construction

# Contractor on a mission

With a dedication to veterans, Amcorp has grown to new heights

By WILLIAM KINCAID  
wkincaid@dailystandard.com

CELINA — The sonification of the self-made man achieving the American dream, a Celina veteran went from serving his country in Central America in the 1980s to founding Amcorp Construction in 2009, prioritizing a client-focused, veteran-supported approach to commercial construction.

Since starting from the ground up, President/CEO Tim Rosengarten has taken Amcorp to incredible heights, earning the company a stellar reputation while specializing in work for the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and other federal agencies.

"Tim, he doesn't even have to say why he does it or who he does it for," Amcorp senior estimator Kyle Fortkamp said about his employer's dedication to veterans. "It's the mission, the driving force behind Amcorp — always giving back to veterans."

Amcorp has always been in the VA medical centers. So we're constantly surrounded by veterans."

Headquartered in Celina and boasting a team of estimators, project managers, construction field experts and other seasoned leaders, Amcorp offers a range of services, including pre-construction, construction, low-voltage and electrical solutions, and project management.

"This big open area is what we call the

war room," Fortkamp pointed out. "Estimators and project managers get together, discuss or questions we may have on a job or how we would attack things. That's kind of where we get together as a collective."

Some of Amcorp's major government projects include the limestone replacement of the Pentagon, facade correction of the VA Medical Center in Indianapolis, replacement of the roof system of the Kinearay Federal Courthouse in Columbus, and the replacement of exterior signage at the Ann Arbor VA Medical Center.

"It's a nutshell. Rosengarten and his fellow combat engineers prepared the way for the military to mobilize for potential action."

"At any moment, if you're called, you will be called. It's a runway strip, any kind of situation where they have to get across," he explained. "We built a few airstrips down in Honduras, when Honduras and Nicaragua (tensions) were going on in '84. There wasn't really any wars, but there was a lot of drug trafficking going on in that year, and so we had to prep everything up."

After the U.S. Army, Rosengarten continued to explore construction on the commercial side, learning more about drafting, design and other facets of the industry working for various companies in Oregon and Colorado.

"I think that was the best time to start," he said. "We were doing a lot of credit card purchase work for the VA and the military. We would do a lot of work in Columbus, Dayton, Cincinnati, and I knew the government very well anyway."

Amcorp initially rented a small corner of the commercial structure it now fully occupies at 8511 State Route 703.

"When the company started, this building was shared, I think, with three other companies," Fortkamp said. "We kind of had this idea we were going to do something, and then as those companies kind of moved on to bigger and better things or just gave up the business. Tim bought more and more chunks of it."

**A startup emerges**  
With the support of his wife, Mary, Rosengarten launched the startup Armcorp in 2009, did Murfreesboro, Tennessee, and then did Port Dix in New Jersey, Paris Island, South Carolina — a Marine base."

"Today, Armcorp has outgrown the space and we have to move to a larger general contractor, and that's where I'm going to be, because that's what I know."

Rosengarten literally dug the foundations and poured concrete and hired area tradesmen for local projects.

"Mary worked for the first three years of the company. She did all the bookwork," he said. "I was out in the field. I would estimate it, I would go out in the field and do it. Then I slowly hired people."

Nevertheless, Armcorp hit the ground running and soon began to grow, both regionally and locally.

"Since I'm a veteran, I already knew that I was going to be tackling VA. I knew that a veteran-owned business has the opportunity to do veteran work, and so that's all I was focused on," he said. "But we had to do the Setex renovations and additions, we had to do the Coldwater Machine additions, and to know that my focus was to go after the veteran work, that became a problem."

The company's bread-and-butter, Evans said, is projects in the \$3 million-\$6 million range.

"There's less problems than the \$10 million to \$20 million (projects) but there's still margin

to be made," he said.

Armcorp stays abreast of the competition because of its deep knowledge and experience navigating the intricate federal government contracting process.

"It's a frustrating thing to do federal contracts, a lot of red tape," Rosengarten explained. "A lot of federal work is so stringent and you have to be on it. Our people here know the federal government very well."

**Emphasis on hiring veterans**

Rosengarten makes it a priority to hire veterans.

"Hiring veterans is a very strong passion of mine," Rosengarten said. "We do help veterans out as much as we possibly can. We're in the U.S. Army. The veterans have done so much for us. They give us our freedom. They fight every day."

Slightly tweaking the leadership style instilled in him in the U.S. Army, Rosengarten said he learned that his employees do their best when given flexibility in how they meet company goals.

"In the military, you're directed to do this — or if you don't, that's not a good thing. Here in the civilian world, you can direct someone to do something, but will they do it or won't they?" he said.

"You have to give them accountability. You have to allow your people to fail."

If an employee can execute 70% of the task assigned to them, they should be given a certain latitude in carrying out their responsibilities.

"If I was to dictate or tell them how to do it, these days it doesn't work that way. We've created a system. As long as they hit the target with their process, then they're doing their job. It's a lot easier to

work his way right up to the top.

Armcorp is indeed a place where men and women can start careers, as the firm's structure allows for growth.

For example, Fortkamp got his start with the company in about

2016, beginning as a

laborer and working his way up the ladder to

the top.

At a ceremony at

Armcorp headquarters

in Celina, Bolden hailed the local company for its family culture and amazing business structure.

"One of our biggest assets is that we

have a skilled

workforce," he said.

"We're a construction

thriving county,"

Fortkamp stressed. "There's a lot of construction going on in the county and we've kind of found our own niches. Some are manufacturing, some are residential, and we just happen to be federal. So it's a good market to be in when it comes to subs and clients."

**Business of the Year**

Terry A. Bolden,

district director of the

U.S. Small Business

Administration's Columbus/Cleveland District Office, bestowed the 2024 Veteran Business of the Year Award to Armcorp on May 5, 2025.

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Midmark Corp.

# Mastering the art of innovation



The Midmark Experience Center features several dental, medical and veterinary office mockups that allow prospective clients to better see and understand how Midmark products work.

## Versailles manufacturer focuses on making clinical spaces better

By ABIGAIL MILLER  
amiller@dailystandard.com

VERSAILLES — Through purposeful designs and strategic acquisitions, an area manufacturer has grown from a small machining company making industrial equipment to a global health care company producing innovative equipment in a little over a century.

Founded in Minster as the Cummings Machine Co. in 1915, what is now Midmark Corp. started out manufacturing concrete mixers. The company used patents owned by then company president EC Cummings to manufacture the mixers.

Cummings then acquired Reeves Pulley Co. in 1920 and began making gasoline-powered locomotives. A year later, John W. Eiting was appointed to its board of directors, kicking off four generations of Eiting leadership within the company. John Eiting became the president of the company, now called Industrial Equipment Co., in 1925.

The company, which just celebrated its 110th anniversary, has been able to consistently reinvent itself year-after-year. Its biggest transition occurred in the 1960s under the leadership of John's son Carl, when it ventured into the medical equipment market, moved its headquarters to their current home in Versailles and eventually, by the end of the decade, took on the name Midmark.

"That shift really changed the direction of the company. From that, we grew through the years," current CEO Jon Wells said. "In the last 20 years, we added dental products as well as veterinary products."

In addition to its headquarters in Versailles, Midmark has five other U.S. facilities, located at Austin Landing in Miamisburg; Traverse City, Michigan; Kansas City, Kansas; Glasgow, Kentucky; and Tampa, Florida.

They also maintain international subsidiaries in Italy and India.

Its Austin Landing location takes up 12,700 square feet; Kentucky — 63,700 square feet;



Midmark also offers products like this anesthesia machine for veterinary use.

Kansas — 209,650 square feet; Florida — 1,200 square feet; and Michigan — 12,450 square feet.

Midmark's base in Versailles takes up a massive 680,885 square feet in total; this includes 502,385 square feet of total manufacturing space, 174,000 square feet of office space and a 4,500-square-foot warehouse for new product development.

### Medical, dental and veterinary

With help from its 2,000 employees worldwide, of which 1,200 are in Versailles, the corporation's mission is: "Improving the experience between the patient and the caregiver is at the heart of everything we do."

To deliver on that commitment, Midmark designs a comprehensive ecosystem of products for medical, dental and veterinary environments, Wells said.

Its medical offerings include exam and procedure rooms that integrate exam chairs, cabinetry, diagnostic devices and digital workflows. This includes the Midmark CareFlow RTLS (real-time locating systems) and design services.

RTLS is a real-time locating system for its medical customers that uses tags, sensors and badges to track staff, patients and equipment.

The system, powered by Wi-Fi, Bluetooth and infrared technologies, is designed to track assets, optimize patient flow,

improve staff safety, automate nurse call systems and provide various medical data.

The company also offers a wide range of dental products. Those include operatories and instrument processing spaces "that support both clinical excellence and patient comfort," Wells said.

In addition, the company is focused on improving the experience of non-human patients too. Its veterinary medicine offerings include "clinical environments designed to meet the unique needs of animal care while supporting efficient, compassionate workflows."

Midmark's business units are a result of numerous company acquisitions over the years, Wells said.

"We've grown through acquisition. We bought a lot of companies over the years to expand our offerings and services to our customers," he said.

### Customer relations

Primarily, Midmark sells its products through distribution partners, which Wells said is beneficial because they understand the company's various markets and customers.

"We also have sales teams who collaborate with health systems,

group practices and clinics," Wells said. "Today, we have nearly 150 teammates on our sales team."

The sales team utilizes the Midmark Experience Center in Versailles. The center is much more than a typical showroom, as it features several dental, medical and veterinary office mockups that allow prospective clients to better see and understand how Midmark products work.

"(The center) allows customers to see fully integrated spaces, collaborate with our designers and plan their own care environments. We have hosted 178 customer visits so far (in 2025, as of Dec. 9)," Wells said.

The experiences of visiting customers don't stop at a visit to Midmark's expansive showroom. Its sales team also utilizes the company's network of hospitality ventures in the Versailles area through its subsidiary Renaissance Corp., such as Hotel Versailles downtown and the Stillwater Valley Golf Club just outside of town in Webster.

"These ventures create places where families, our customers and guests can gather, strengthening the social

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## Art

(From page 6B)

and economic fabric of the community," Wells said. "They also help make Versailles a destination opportunity — a place where people can build global careers while enjoying local amenities."

### Leading with care

The idea of caring for one another is at the heart of all of Midmark's ventures, said Dr. Thomas Schwieterman, the company's vice president of clinical affairs and chief medical officer.

That principle has led the corporation to engage heavily in its surrounding communities.

"When you have the means, you have the responsibility. (Our) logo has a heart in the middle, and that is intentional, because we care for our communities and each other," Schwieterman said. "It's not a side story. It's intrinsic to who we are. And, that stems from Jon and from the Eiting family. It's not a push to do that kind of work, it's a pull from leadership."

The company's philanthropic endeavors are led by global philanthropic and corporate giving manager Mitch Eiting.

"Our teammates are passionate about giving back — whether through partnerships with organizations like Community Meals here in Versailles, hosting blood drives or supporting wellness initiatives, we take pride in making a difference where we live and work," Wells said.

Since 2013, Midmark's Versailles employees have donated over 7,000 units of blood, which equates to 1,275 lives saved. Its employees also serve locally in positions on the Versailles Exempted Village Schools Board of Education, the Versailles YMCA board and the board for an area chapter of the American Heart Association.

Recent donations included contributing \$10,000 to the village's YMCA re-opening efforts, and a donation of almost 600 sterilizers and exam tables in 2025, which were distributed by World Vision to health facilities serving vulnerable populations.

"Strengthening Versailles, Darke County and the region is essential to sustaining a long-term talent pipeline," Wells added.

### Building the future

Midmark also supports the area by heavily investing in its future through science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education.

The company is the primary donor behind Versailles Schools' Technology Center, which opened in October of 2024. The center boasts a STEM classroom with 24 computers and 3D printers, a robotics lab,

and efficiencies.

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## Thieman Tailgates

# Doing the heavy lifting

## Family-owned liftgate maker welcomes fourth generation to workplace

By TOM MILLHOUSE  
tmillhouse@dailystandard.com

CELINA — The fourth generation of an area family is continuing a tradition of doing some of the heavy lifting for customers by manufacturing liftgates to ease the burden of delivering goods throughout the United States.

Thieman Tailgates Inc., 600 Wayne St., makes a variety of hydraulic liftgates for light, medium and heavy-duty trucks and trailers.

A liftgate is a hydraulic platform at the rear of a truck or freight carrier designed to bridge the gap between ground level and the cargo area. The equipment is crucial for loading and unloading heavy materials and large cargo quantities. The liftgates manufactured by Thieman Tailgates have capacities to lift from 1,000 to 6,600 pounds.

Company vice president Todd Thieman said the company is an offshoot of Thieman Stamping (now known as Thieman Quality Metal Fab Inc.), which continues to operate near New Bremen. Thieman Stamping & Metal Fab, a separate company headed by Thieman's sister, Michelle (Thieman) Suchland, fabricates metal parts and provides a number of other services, such as welding, laser cutting and engineering.

He explained that Thieman Stamping, founded by his grandfather, Wilson Thieman, in 1951, made parts for TODCO, a liftgate manufacturer in Toledo.

"TODCO wanted to get out of the liftgate business and we already knew how to make the parts," Thieman said of the decision to purchase the business in 1987.

With the purchase of TODCO, additional manufacturing capacity was needed. Thieman said the search ended with the purchase of two vacant buildings on Wayne Street in Celina that once housed the Speicher Trencher ditching machine manufacturing facility.

"We kind of built around them," he said of the old buildings.

Thieman Tailgates started with a dozen workers and has grown to a workforce of 80.

Thieman said his company can produce standard liftgates, but their specialty is units designed to meet the specific requirements laid out by customers.

"We'll build it special, something they can't get at other places," he said, adding, "They want it exactly the way they want it." The company has a team of five engineers who work with



Paige Sutter/The Daily Standard

Craig Lunz welds aluminum at the Thieman Tailgate shop in Celina.

customers to meet their needs.

Although most of the production involves customized liftgates, Thieman said they also receive some large orders for multiple units.

"We've got some customers who purchase a couple hundred units at a time," he said.

Thieman tailgate units can be found on pickup trucks, delivery trucks and semitrailers.

Nearly all of the company's sales are made through regional distributors.

"We have distributors around the country that buy the liftgates and then the customers bring the trucks to them (distributors) to install it for them," he said, adding that the company also has distributors in Canada. "We don't know who exactly are the end users," he said.

One of the largest distributors is Kalida Truck Equipment.

"Probably 90% of our business is done east of the Mississippi, mostly because of the freight costs to get the product out to the West Coast," he said.

While the sales are primarily in the eastern half of the United States, Thieman said area residents on vacation have sent him photos of trucks outfitted with Thieman Tailgates "from the middle of nowhere. We had one photo of a Thieman Tailgate in Hawaii."

Sales have been "relatively steady" in recent years, according to Thieman, with last year's sales between \$25 million and \$30 million.

"Last year was off a little bit," he noted. "We had orders coming in but we couldn't get them out because of supply chain issues."

The supply chain issues arose during the COVID-19 pandemic. The company's workforce was up to around 100 people before the



Submitted photo

The liftgates manufactured by Thieman Tailgates have capacities to lift from 1,000 to 6,600 pounds.

pandemic, but tapered off slightly because of difficulty in getting all the parts needed to fill orders. Thieman said the supply chain issues appear to be easing.

He also noted that President Trump's tariffs have not had much effect on the company since they are not dependent on parts from China.

At one time, nearly all of the liftgates were constructed entirely of steel, but that has gradually changed because of a shift to aluminum components. Thieman said aluminum tailgates make up half of all sales. He said the main reason for the change is that aluminum is lighter and more corrosion resistant than steel.

"Most of the tailgates are hanging underneath the trucks where it's taking all the road spray and rocks and stuff like that," he said. "They get beat up quite a bit going down the road."

The company has some new products in development — a process that requires patience, Thieman noted. "Usually it takes two or three years from the time somebody has an idea to the time we design it and put it out on road tests," he said. "We road test it for two years. The hardest thing on a tailgate is running up and down

the road, hitting the potholes and bouncing around on the truck."

In addition to the supply chain issues, Thieman said his company has the same problem as other employers in west central Ohio: finding workers.

He said the company's workforce is primarily



Paige Sutter/The Daily Standard

After the purchase of TODCO in 1987, Thieman Tailgate needed additional manufacturing space so the company purchased two buildings on Wayne Street in Celina where they remain.



Submitted photo

The company's specialty is units designed to meet specific requirements laid out by customers.

made up of people who have been with Thieman Tailgates for more than 20 years. Thieman started working there himself while he was still in junior high school and has been with the company since 1987.

He learned the tailgate business from his father, Tom Thieman, who is retired and lives in New Bremen.

The family tradition has continued with Todd's son, Aaron, who works in

assembly, and his daughter, Abbi, who serves as marketing coordinator.

Abbi Thieman, who has been in the business since 2021, said she places ads for the company's tailgates in trade publications for businesses such as propane gas delivery to promote tailgate sales. Another facet of her job is working at trade shows, taking displays to places like Indianapolis and Nashville.

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