

Ardisam outdoor products hit the mark in all seasons

By Pamela Rust

Employees are so satisfied with their working conditions they rejected unionization.

Managers can view on-line the progress of hundreds of items in production.

Product distributors around the globe are eager for their next product shipment.

Sound farfetched?

The description exactly fits outdoor power equipment manufacturer Ardisam, Inc. in Cumberland.

The firm was established in 1960 when Arnie Isham, Dick Ruppel and Sam Ranallo (the company name derives from ARnie, DIck and SAM) decided to build and sell powered ice augers. Cumberland, about 95 miles south of Superior on U.S. 63, is surrounded by lakes, so the product filled a local niche — with virtually unlimited market potential.

Hand ice drills followed in 1975, then earth augers. In the mid 1980s the company began producing rototillers. Now Ardisam manufactures hundreds of different outdoor implements sold under three company brands.

Dick Ruppel bought out his partners years ago. In 1994 he sold the company to two of his seven children, Ron and Mark.

Older brother Ron is the CEO, in charge of marketing, sales, and strategy. Mark is vice president and the head of manufacturing. The two worked part-time at the company as teenagers, spread their wings, then came back in the mid 1970s, staying on to

at a glance

Ardisam, Inc.

www.ardisam.com

Owners: Mark and Ron Ruppel

Location: seven buildings and a total of 170,000 square feet in Cumberland.

Estimated 2002 Revenues: \$20 million.

Employees: 110 full-time, 60 part-time employees.

Services/Strategy: Manufactures quality outdoor power equipment under three house brands sold year-round.

learn the ropes.

Their management style is to keep to their own sides of the business. "It's very clean and works well for us," says Ron, 48.

All manufacturing and quality control takes place in Cumberland, including welding, stamping, sewing, powdercoating, assembly and packaging. With seven buildings, diverse manufacturing processes are separated. For example, fabrication, a dusty process, is in a different building than packaging.

"We have the capacity, through overseas subcontractors, to produce all our needed parts," says Mark.

Many of Ardisam's parts suppliers are subcontractors located in the Pacific Rim,

including Thailand, South Korea, Taiwan and China.

Year-round products

"Diversification is the key to our success," says Mark, 47.

In the past, seasonal peaks and lows resulted in workers being hired and then laid off. To provide steady employment and increase sales, the management team developed a mix of products that consumers buy year-round.

"Now we put our energy behind the line in season," he says, explaining that workers perform different tasks throughout the year. "Assemblers aren't doing the same thing day-in, day-out."

In October, all three product lines were in production.

Ardisam's spring product line is Earthquake® lawn and garden products, including rototillers, mowers, edgers, wood chippers/shredders and earth augers.

For summer-fall, there is the Rivers Edge® hunting line that includes deer stands and other items.

For the winter season, there are Eskimo® ice augers and ice shelters.

An imported line of fur hats, gloves and mittens is sold as Yukon Tracks®.



photo courtesy of Ardisam

Brothers Ron (left) and Mark Ruppel co-own and co-manage Ardisam. The firm uses computer-aided manufacturing and software tools to produce its popular all-season outdoor products.

Products reach consumers through a network of distributors. Ardisam also sells directly to chain stores like Farm & Fleet, or to importers in Canada, England, Finland, Australia, New Zealand, Italy and several South American countries.

Competitor Feldmann Engineering & Manufacturing, in Sheboygan Falls, WI, claims it was the first to invent and sell a powered ice auger in 1951.

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