

Woodland Equipment, Inc. A New Generation Plans New Growth With Tigercat Line

By Alan Condra

The First Forty Years

Iron River, Michigan—Back in the 1970s, Ron Beauchamp, Sr. had the urge to return to his roots in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. He had a good career path, first as a chemical engineer for Dow Chemical, then as metallurgist for Ford. That career path kept him in Detroit but he had a desire to raise his family back home. In 1974 the Beauchamp family made the move to Iron River, Michigan, and Ron took his career in a different direction. Triangulating the predominance of the forestry industry in the Upper Peninsula, his interest in machines, and his entrepreneurial spirit, he bought an existing logging equipment dealership. According to his son, Ron, Jr., the career move was actually a natural fit for his father. "My dad has always been very technical," Ron, Jr. notes. "He likes iron, he likes understanding how systems work together. He was a gear head growing up so he likes machines, engines, and hydraulics."

Initially Northroads, the dealership, sold logging equipment for the times – Tree Farmer skidders, Barko loaders, International trucks. After a few years and partners, the dealership was renamed Woodland Equipment, Inc. (WEI).

As the oldest of the four Beauchamp children, Ron, Jr. was ten at the time of the move to Iron River. As is typical of a family business, he did his part at the dealership, sweeping floors and steam cleaning forestry equipment. Ron recalls with amusement, "I grew up in the shop and did everything an owner's kid does, including get yelled at more than everyone else." Ron, Sr. would get aspen jobs and Ron, Jr. would peel pulp every year. As the younger Beauchamp got older, he would prep and paint equipment



The heavy duty construction of Tigercat's 1075C 20 tonne forwarder makes it well suited for high production applications and extreme conditions.



Ron Beauchamp, Sr. (left), founder of Woodland Equipment Inc. (WEI) with his son, Ron, Jr. (right), who joined the company in 2014.



Tigercat 822D feller buncher. Woodland Equipment Inc. (WEI) has recently added the Tigercat brand to its line-up and plans to showcase the it at the September Great Lakes Logging & Heavy Equipment Expo in Oshkosh, Wisconsin.

that was being refurbished. Ron, Jr. worked for his dad through high school and into his first year of college at Northern Michigan University in Marquette, Michigan.

Like other well established businesses, Woodland Equipment has been responsive to the evolving marketplace over the decades. The Great Lakes states have long been a focal point for cut to length harvesting and Ron, Sr. strived to serve that market. Ron, Jr. notes, “My dad was really early to spot the potential of cut to length and did a lot of pioneering work. That goes back to his interests and how he’s wired. He likes to dig into something emerging like that and figure out how to do it. That’s a significant reason of why he has been here for forty some years.”

One example of Ron, Sr.’s pioneering work in the 90s for the cut to length market is the Woodland Computer System, a dedicated controller for CTL harvesters. With knowledge of what his customers were looking for in a CTL controller, the elder Beauchamp felt that the existing systems in the market were collecting a lot of information and requiring a lot of input that was confusing for operators and were missing the mark. So Ron, Sr. set out to build a cut to length control system that would be easy to use for the operator. Housed in the harvester head, the Woodland Computer System design requires few hydraulic and electrical lines to be run down the length of the boom, minimizing cost and number of potential failure point. Now in its third genera-

tion after 20 years, the Woodland Computer System offers improved shock and humidity resistance, greater temperature range, and bigger color screens – while still maintaining the original design point – easy for the operator to use.

On the business side, Ron Sr. created Lake Superior Leasing as a separate entity twenty years ago to help forestry entrepreneurs get their start or move to the next level by offering lease to own opportunities.

The Next Generation

Ron, Jr. was not planning on coming back to Iron River when he left for college and his career. At Northern Michigan he graduated with a double major in Business Administration and Computer Information Systems. After extended internships at Mead Paper in Escanaba, Michigan, the company created an information technology position for Ron at the time when the personal computer and networks were emerging as a significant factor in the business world.

Over the last three decades, Ron, Jr. has built his resume primarily with well-known corporations. As Ron puts it, after Mead he moved to Green Bay, Wisconsin and “did three tours of duty with IBM.” His first position with IBM was in the field of technical marketing, working with the company’s largest customers. His later tours with IBM included developing disaster recovery solutions for large data centers and as Central Region Manager.

When the travel schedule became too much for the Beauchamp family life, Ron went to work for Motorola in 2006 in technical sales for Wisconsin. Honeywell recruited Ron away from Motorola to be their Director of US Strategic Sales, his team worked with major companies such as Amazon, Caterpillar, and UPS. With the exception of brief stints in Cincinnati and Minneapolis, the Beauchamp family has called Green Bay their home for nearly 30 years.

In November of 2013, Ron’s dad called him enroute to Savannah, Georgia, where Ron’s parents spend a month each year with one of Ron’s siblings. Ron, Sr., now in his early 70s, talked to Ron about wanting to continue with what he had built at Woodland Equipment, but with a reduced role for himself. Ron, Jr. recalled, “He told me that he wanted me to think about coming back and taking the place over. It was out of left field. In the twenty years prior to that we had not had a serious conversation about me coming back, and frankly I hadn’t considered it.” Throughout his wide ranging career Ron, Jr. ran businesses, managed people and finances, created direction to get people to rally behind it, but had never considered following in his father’s footsteps.

Later that month, Ron, Jr. went down to Savannah to spend time with his folks and his brother’s family. Father and son spent the week discussing the future potential for Woodland Equipment. They talked about what would work as well as what wouldn’t. In the end, Ron, Jr. steered his career once

again, this time back to his roots.

Ron, Jr. joined his father at WEI in January of 2014, while continuing to live in Green Bay where he and his wife have deep roots in their church and community. Very much aware that he had much to learn about the forestry business, Ron used the first few months to absorb as much information as he could. Ron noted, "I was determined that I wasn't going to come in and flip the company on its head. I knew I had a lot to learn. For the first six months I just listened, observed, asked questions and tried not to jump to any conclusions." Over time Ron came to initial observations and conclusions, which he discussed with his father. These discussions ranged from financial strategy to product offerings.

Since Ron, Jr. joined WEI, Ron, Sr. has been able to take a more relaxed role at the company he created. The elder Beauchamp still comes in regularly and works on projects in the shop, relinquishing sales and other management duties to his son. Ron, Jr. says that he routinely relies on his father's 42 years of experience regarding relationships with customers and suppliers. "I respect what he built here, he's as involved as he wants to be," noted the younger Beauchamp.

Today WEI is a dealer for the equipment manufacturers Risley, TimberPro, Timberheads, Quadco, and LogMax. WEI is the biggest Risley dealer in the world, selling more Rolly heads than all other dealers combined. WEI regularly sells and services equipment to customers as far away as

Pennsylvania and Kentucky. Ron says this was because, "Over the 40 years, there's just been a lot of those organic relationships built within the customer base." Ron credits WEI's success with the fact that the company is entirely focused on the forestry market, compared to many dealers who work partially or primarily in excavation equipment. "We're specialized in forestry, that's all we do," Ron notes.

While he recently brought in new hires to 'strengthen the bench' as Ron put it, a key ingredient to WEI's longevity is the experience of the company's 15 employees. Ron proudly notes that the average tenure of his employees is well over twenty years.

"My dad was a trained scientist who learned the business environment and made it work for 40 years because of customer loyalty to him and because he stood behind what he sold," Ron said. Following in the experienced footsteps of his father, Ron spends much of his time getting out and talking to the customers and asking a lot of questions. Ron said, "If I spend too much time in the office, I just have to get out. I like being with customers. That's where you really learn what's going on and get a good sense of what the new solutions might be."

What Comes Next

Looking to the horizon and keeping in mind all the feedback from his customers, Ron, Jr. sums up his current outlook. "I'm looking at the long term. Where do we need to be to satisfy the market over the next 10 to 20 years?" Shortly after coming to WEI,

Ron started a two year process of considering options that would expand his brand offerings. "I was looking at a couple things," Ron said. "One was satisfying the need for a high quality select cut forwarder for our customers. The other was to expand our footprint with a full product line."

Ron considered many different equipment brands, including brands not currently represented in the U.S., before choosing Tigercat. "Part of the two year process was talking to customers," Ron explained. "I told them that I was considering picking up a new line. Which ones do you think make sense? Tigercat was the overwhelming choice of the customers I talked to."

"Tigercat is an established North American company, building premium products for over 20 years," Ron said. "They have a rugged North American design." After spending a couple days with Tigercat leadership and company owner, Ken MacDonald, Ron said that he admired the focus and passion the company's founder had for the Tigercat company, machines, and brand. He was also impressed with the amount of investment the company has made in their facilities, allowing them to take more of the processes in-house and increase production for growing demand. Noting that over the span of his varied career, he had been in roughly 500 manufacturing facilities, Ron said, "They're one of the most impressive operations I've seen. They've made real investment back into the company and they are genuine and accessible people focused on a shared vision."

"Tigercat is a forestry focused company that is dedicated to high quality and durability. What I want is a machine that gives our customers the best total cost of ownership. There's the initial acquisition cost - this is not going to be the least expensive machine. It's probably going to be the most expensive machine you can buy initially. But what we're satisfied with is, over the time our customer owns the machine, Tigercat offers the lowest total cost because of durability and the strength in the way it's built."

In order to evaluate and attract a new dealer such as WEI, Tigercat likes to bring prospects to their Brantford, Ontario home base to meet the company. Kevin Selby, U.S. Sales Manager for Tigercat Industries, Inc. explains, "When we bring in current or prospective dealers, vendors, or end users, they're meeting all of the key people in our organization." Accordingly, Ron had the opportunity to experience the family feeling within the company by meeting everyone



The LX830D model feller buncher is designed for steep terrain and features a closed loop track system that allows for speed and superior performance.



Tigercat's 570 is a high performance harvesting head ideally suited to the Tigercat H845 series carrier.

from key executives to the marketing and engineering staffs to the folks on the floor building the machines. Kevin, himself a 17 year employee, said, "It's a very close knit organization. We let them (dealer prospects) experience that as they walk through our facilities. It's very impressive."

Ron believes that the breadth of the Tigercat lineup fits his vision of the future for WEI. He said, "We needed more geographic coverage and we needed a broader range of products. Our preference was for durability, strength, and quality and we were looking for a company that was focused on forestry." Regarding loggers wanting a sole source for their equipment needs, Ron said, "There were some potential customers that wouldn't look at us because they couldn't buy everything they wanted from us. Customers like to get their equipment, parts, and service from one place. We want to be that partner."

Kevin explains the key selling points of

the Tigercat brand saying, "We've always prided ourselves on durability, longevity, resale value, and the fact that our primary focus is on forestry." The nearly 25 year old company has been focused on innovation since the start. Kevin observed, "Over the years we've developed innovations that have been copied by our competitors." Noting with some irony, Kevin added, "It's kind of entertaining when the small guy on the block competing against some of the giants, is doing a lot of the engineering work for everybody."

One of the company's early innovations was a hydrostatic skidder in the 90s that was met with some skepticism by other equipment makers. "Now you have variations of hydrostatic skidders being built by competitive manufacturers that have spent 20 plus years saying it won't work," Kevin added.

Kevin pointed to their drivetrain systems as another point of difference the company likes to showcase. "Tigercat builds

their own because they believe they can build them stronger and more reliable over time. They've done that with hydraulic systems, bogies and other parts of the machine where they feel like their engineering allows them to get to the next level."

The company worked out an engineering design for their undercarriage with the Italian company Berco that is an upgraded Berco design. "This resulted in a stronger undercarriage which is going to give our customers a longer lasting undercarriage, reducing their ongoing expense," Kevin noted.

From Tigercat's perspective, adding Woodland to their worldwide dealer network is a great fit that they have been looking for. Although Tigercat had initial discussions with other potential dealers, until the WEI agreement they did not have a Michigan presence. "Michigan's been on our radar for quite some time," according to Kevin. Although the company sold a few machines directly to operators in Michigan, they sought to grow their market through a strong, established dealership in the region.

Kevin is confident that WEI will strengthen their position in the cut to length market. Kevin noted, "Woodland will establish a footprint in an area where we've been non-existent." Tigercat has several dealers in New England where CTL has an established market. A dealership dedicated to CTL forestry in the Great Lake states represents a significant opportunity for Tigercat.

Even before the final agreement between WEI and Tigercat was signed, Ron had already begun preliminary sales discussions with his customers. He anticipates being able to put the Tigercat equipment in action in his market, that will in turn help him showcase the machines to other customers. Ron also plans on having a new harvester as well as a forwarder on his lot for potential buyers to kick the tires.

Plans are coming together for WEI to showcase the Tigercat line at the September Great Lakes Logging & Heavy Equipment Expo in Oshkosh, Wisconsin. On site at the Woodland exhibit will be a Tigercat feller buncher as well as a forwarder.



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The Tigercat 620E log skidder is a hard pulling, reliable skidder that works well in a wide variety of applications.