

Tribute to Harry Van Hagens

Highly Dedicated, Always Customer Focused

By Debora Babin Katz

"I have seen just about every type of grinding problem there is," said Harry Van Hagens once. True words spoken from a man whose career in the tooling and sharpening industry spanned over 40 years. Harry worked for Cincinnati Milacron, Oertli and Vollmer in Europe before coming to Kingston, MA to join the team at Colonial Saw Company in 1984. "When I first met Harry in Hannover, Germany, he won me over in less than five minutes with his knowledge of the grinding industry, and his quiet, without, as my mother used to say, 'tooting his own horn' way," recalled Paul Ravinski, President of Colonial Saw. Within months, Paul Ravinski had convinced Harry to leave the Netherlands and work with him in the United States.

Harry's extraordinary knowledge and ability to work with customers, always focusing on solving any issue they brought to his attention, quickly became an asset to the Company. "Harry was always there for us, and anyone else that needed help solving a problem on a machine," said Paul Ravinski.

He became a mentor to Colonial Saw's technicians. "He instilled in them his traits of respect for the customer and getting the job done quickly and professionally," noted Dave Rakauskas, Vice President of Colonial Saw Company. "He assisted them, but would never enable them," added Paul Ravinski.

Customers, dealers and the technical staff at Colonial Saw all knew they could count on Harry to freely share his



Harry Van Hagens worked 24 years at Colonial Saw Company.

vast knowledge of mechanical and electrical troubleshooting. Harry developed a hard working ethic early on in his career. He paid careful attention to details and had an incredible ability to meet deadlines. Harry worked effectively with others, and believed in doing whatever was necessary to get the job done.

In 1991, Harry agreed to meet a new challenge, that of managing the West Coast branch. "He took on this responsibility with his usual passion," said Paul Ravinski, "and used his strong people skills to develop relationships with his dealers."

Harry was instrumental in the growth and developments of Colonial Saw's West Coast office. Today, Colonial

Saw is the only grinding machinery supplier with parts, machines and a showroom on both the East Coast and West Coasts. This presence has allowed the Company to get parts and support to its customers on both coasts quickly, economically, and within their time zone schedules. The impact of this led to Colonial Saw Company winning the title of Supplier of the Year for the Woodworking Machinery Industry Association. Harry was also appointed to the board of directors of the Association of Woodworking & Furnishings Suppliers ("AWFS").

On December 11th, 2008 in San Jose, California, Harry died unexpectedly from a fatal heart attack. A highly dedicated employee, who was always focused on his customers' needs first and foremost, Harry Van Hagen will be greatly missed by all of us at Colonial Saw Company.

Since his passing, we have received an overwhelming number of correspondences from customers, dealers, association members, and other sharpening and woodworking colleagues about how Harry impacted their lives. It is a true testament of Harry's passion for the industry he loved and, his dedication to those who worked in it.



A technical engineer, Harry Van Hagens specialized in the tool sharpening and woodworking industry.

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Sharpening Spotlight continued...

The following are some of the thoughts people have shared with us about Harry:

"Harry will truly be missed. He was not just my friend, but a very knowledgeable person about the industry who helped me a lot." (Alex)

"Harry will always be remembered as a Gentleman, fun loving, amazing salesman. I will miss him dearly." (Gene)

"He was such a great man. A person of integrity! Over the years, his friendship meant the world to me." (Hearty)

"He was a great man and not only will you guys at Colonial Saw and his family miss him, the entire grinding/sharpening world will." (Chuck)

"I just received this news. Our thoughts and prayers go out to Harry's family, and everyone in the Colonial Saw Family." (Tim)

"Harry's reaction was always what could he do to help you. Then, of course, if one of the machines he sold was the answer, he could get you set up :). I, along with the industry, will miss him." (Scott)

"I wanted to send my condolences to the passing of Harry. He was a good friend that I had

the pleasure of working with for the past 15 years or more with Louis." (Steve)

"Very sad news indeed. Harry will be greatly missed by those of us who knew him and depended on his expertise, knowledge and friendship." (Paul)

"Last Thursday family, friends, and the industry lost a great man. I truly enjoyed traveling with Harry and was always impressed not only with his vast knowledge, but also his ability to connect with everyone he met, gathering respect wherever he went." (Troy)

"Dave, that is a loss for our industry and those he worked with. Please relay our deepest sympathy to his family and co-workers." (Duncan)

"We are very sorry, and feel close to you in this painful moment, sharing the great lack of the Person of high knowledge and passion for his work that we had the fortune to know during these long years of working together." (Marco, Renzo, Marco)

"We are very sorry to learn of the sudden death of Harry. It is very hard for us to grasp the thought that he is no longer amongst us. Harry was a great character and did a lot



Harry Van Hagens always focused on his customers and their needs. Harry seen here at the IWF 2008

for Colonial Saw and Lamello." (Erich and the Lamello Team)

"Harry was a well respected gentleman...our thoughts and prayers are with you and the team at Colonial Saw." (Rob)

"We are all torn up about Harry--we loved the guy a lot." (Tom)

"This passing of Harry is heartfelt in San Diego. We all loved it when Harry was able to visit us and share his incredible knowledge. He had a drawing personality and will be missed." (Sandy)

"I'm sorry to hear the loss of a very special person, Harry. Our thoughts and prayers go out to his Family and everyone at Colonial Saw. We will miss him." (Greg)

"I called Harry a Superstar. We can see Harry every night in the sky." (Rudy)

"I'll carry with me always the simple maxim he taught me long ago to remind me about keeping things right sized and manageable: 'Every problem has a solution. If there is no solution it is not a problem.'" (Mark)



Note to the reader: A memorial Web site for Harry Van Hagens by his family can be found at mem.com