

# The **Business** Journal

The Valley's Business Matters

www.business-journal.com

ISSN 1047-8582 Vol. 24 No. 9 MidNOVEMBER 2007 \$2.50

## All Pumped Up

*Dearing Compressor overcomes two major industry crashes.*

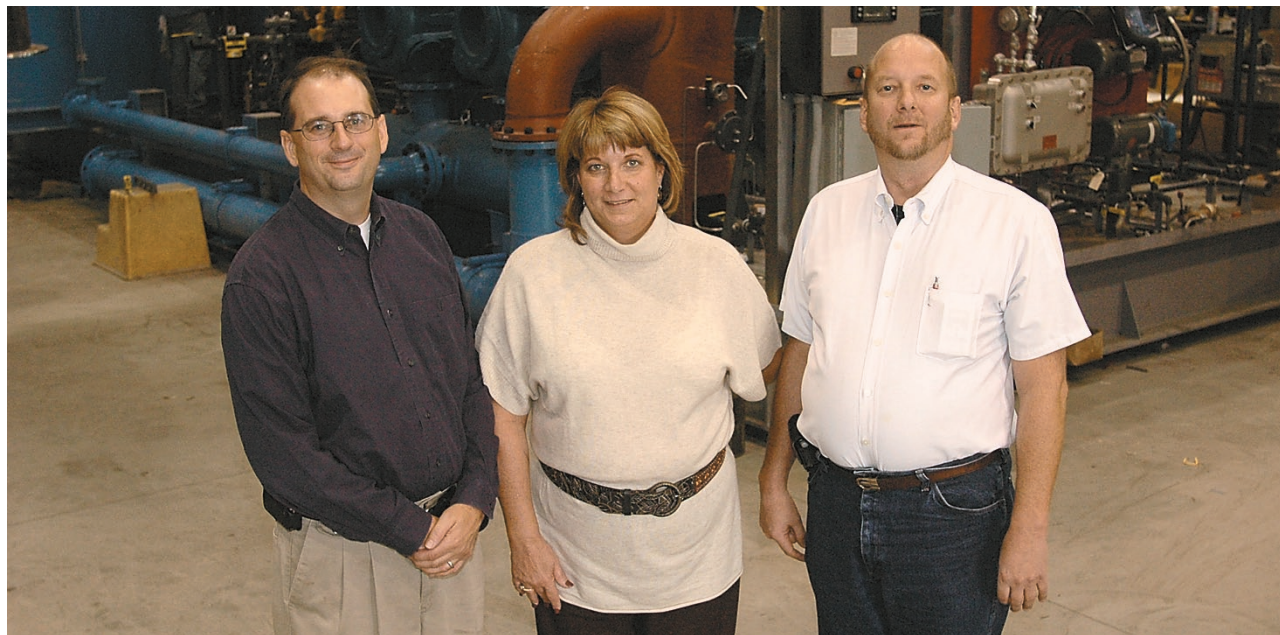
By Cynthia Vinarsky

Three siblings who operate a third-generation family business in Boardman say they're pumped up about swelling sales and new market prospects after completing a \$1-million expansion.

Owners of Dearing Compressor & Pump Co., which engineers, fabricates and sells industrial pumps and compressor systems, report that six times their business has doubled its revenue over the past decade.

Now a 10,000-square-foot addition completed last year at Dearing's headquarters on Simon Road is giving the company more flexibility to adapt to changing markets and add new ones.

"Sometimes I get so tired of hearing all the gloom and doom," says Becky Dearing Wall, vice president and treasurer. "We want to get the news out that there are businesses in the Mahoning Valley, like



Siblings Albin Dearing, Becky Dearing Wall and Rick Dearing operate Dearing Compressor & Pump Co. in Boardman.

ours, that are doing really well. People don't know that we're here, let alone what we do."

Dearing Wall and her brother Rick Dearing, a petroleum engineer and the president of the company, bought the family business when their father, Richard Dearing Sr., retired in 1996. He died a year later.

"He had the foresight to plan for succession,"

Rick Dearing says of his father. "Otherwise, the business would have been gone."

Their younger brother, Albin Dearing, also joined the company and serves as sales manager; Becky Dearing Wall's husband, Robin Wall, is vice president of sales. Another sister, Debbie Dearing Bjelac, is

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## BikeTown Opens Harley Superstore

By Dennis LaRue

The Harley-Davidson BikeTown that just opened in Austintown at a cost of \$6 million is testament to the support the motorcycle manufacturer gives its dealers, to its credo, "People are an organization's only sustainable competitive advantage."

The owner of BikeTown, Tom Wronkovich, allows, "I guess I've taken a lot for granted," as he discusses the partnerships Harley-Davidson Inc.'s headquarters in Milwaukee strives to build with all its dealers.

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Tom Wronkovich says Harley-Davidson does "all the right things" to keep the brand going.



## How Harley-Davidson Came Roaring Back

By Dennis LaRue

All companies pay at least lip service to how vital their employees, dealers and customers are to their success. Harley-Davidson Inc. says it, means it and practices it.

"People are an organization's only sustainable competitive advantage," a former chief executive officer of Harley-Davidson, Richard Teerlink, told the Thomas Colloquium Oct. 29.

In the annual colloquium on free enterprise, sponsored by Youngstown State University,

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Pipefitters Dave Court, left, and Dave Swantek attach a pipe to a compressor.



Mechanics Randy Boomall and Vernon "Lonnie" Kubankin overhaul an 1980s compressor.

## ***Pumped Up:** Dearing Compressor Overcomes Two Major Industry Crashes*

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also part owner but works as a school psychologist in Trumbull County.

Becky Dearing Wall's son, Ryan Wilson, a recent Kent State University business graduate, is the youngest member of the family on staff. He's "learning the business from the ground up," she says, working with a team of field technicians who service and repair equipment on site.

The company employed 25 when the siblings bought it; the work force has grown to its highest level ever, 70. It has two divisions and both are flourishing, says Dearing Wall.

Dearing's industrial division has been around since the beginning when Albin P. Dearing III, the owners' grandfather, founded the business in 1945 as an electrical and mechanical supply house. He sold air compressors made by Illinois-based Gardner Denver Corp. to Youngstown's booming steel industry.

More than six decades later, Dearing Compressor & Pump is Gardner Denver's second-oldest surviving distributor, selling and servicing its compressors to manufacturing businesses all over northeastern Ohio and northwestern Pennsylvania. "Our customers are like a who's who of local businesses," Albin Dearing relates.

The industrial division's sales comprise about 40% of the company's total revenues. Its territory stretches west to Sandusky and east to Erie, Pa., the sales manager says. Dearing also operates a 7,000-square-foot Gardner Denver parts-and-equipment center in Twinsburg to service its Cleveland and Akron-Canton markets.

Dearing's energy division, added in 1960, designs and builds customized compressors used mainly to power natural-gas and oil-well drilling operations in a 10-state region known as the Appalachian Basin.

Workers at the production plant in Boardman started out building small 60-horsepower compressors in the '60s, Rick Dearing says, and their products grew in size over the years as producers called for ever-larger and more powerful compressors.

Today Dearing manufactures 3,000-horsepower compressors that are so big, he says, it takes three or four semi-tractor trailers to transport them, and it has the capacity to build up to 6,000-horsepower units.

The 10,000-square-foot addition built in 2006 at the plant on Simon Road includes high ceilings and cranes and is designed so that workers can build as many as five huge industrial compressors at once.

"Our whole shop floor is mobile, adjustable for

any project," says Dearing Wall. "Rick designed it that way, so that we can always be flexible to respond to the market. We may not always build these big units, but that's OK. We can adapt."

Dearing's employees are equally adaptable, she says. Its work force includes skilled pipefitters, welders and electricians, but they're cross trained to handle any task. "It's all for one and one for all to get the job done," the vice president explains. "We're very flexible, and that's why we haven't had a layoff since 1980."

Having the two divisions has given Dearing an edge over its competitors, Albin Dearing explains, because customers have a choice. They can get ready-made air compressor systems by Gardner Denver, where appropriate, or they may order custom-engineered packages fabricated at the Boardman plant.

Flexibility and a willingness to adapt to changing markets have been a part of Dearing's business model from the outset, the owners say, and helped the company survive some desperate times over its 62-year history.

Their grandfather died just one year after founding the business he called Dearing & Co., leaving the enterprise to their grandmother, Helen Dearing,

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their father, Richard Dearing, and their uncle, A.P. "Bud" Dearing.

The steel mills provided the small shop with plenty of business, but in 1957 the two brothers decided to separate the mechanical and electrical divisions and so formed two companies.

A.P. "Bud" Dearing started Panelmatic Inc., an employee-owned company on Meadowbrook Avenue that celebrated its 50th anniversary this year as a designer and manufacturer of custom electrical, instrument and pneumatic control panels for industry. The founder is retired but still works with the company as a part-time consultant.

"We're about a half-mile from each other in Boardman, and we still interact like neighbors," Rick Dearing says of Panelmatic. "We have totally different customer bases."

Dearing Compressor & Pump hit its first major slump in the 1977 when "Black Monday" signaled the end of the Mahoning Valley's dominant steel industry. Sales plummeted as the mills closed, idling thousands.

Soon the company found new customers for its compressors in the gas and oil industry, but that business fell apart with the energy crash of the 1980s. It took 15 years to recoup those losses.

"We had no money put aside to help us get through two very large industry crashes because the company invested every penny it had back into the business," says Dearing Wall. "We were able to recover because of our conservative nature, our flexible work force and our loyal customers."

Looking to the future, Rick Dearing says the company is engineering equipment designed to reclaim

natural gas from landfills and coal beds. As supplies of gas accessed easily are exhausted, he explains, producers will seek other sources.

Workers are also researching ways to use Dearing's products for environmental remediation, such as removing gas from ground water, adds Albin Dearing.

The siblings agree that they're sorry their father didn't live to see the company's recent growth. "He would be amazed and proud," says Becky Dearing Wall. "He was very proud of his children and very happy to have us as his successors."

They also agree that, while they're glad to grow, Dearing Compressor & Pump isn't about to go

global. Rick Dearing says the company often gets inquiries from companies around the world, but the owners aren't interested.

"We want to be a regional company with limited growth. We're not interested in growing from 70 employees to 300," remarks Rick Dearing. The owners want to maintain the quality of their products and their emphasis on customer service, he says, and they think they can do that best by keeping the company at its present size.

Albin Dearing concurs. "We all live 10 minutes from the office," he adds with a grin. "We have no interest in flying to Pakistan, Turkistan or any other place."



Jim Macchione, foreman, looks over his checklist as he oversees work at the Boardman plant.

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