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Growth feeds Crystal Creek's expansion

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SPOONER-- "We built this way too big."

If past history is any indication, that may well be the thought as Dan, Jan, and Ryan Leiterman stand inside Crystal Creek's newest warehouse expansion project, now under construction.

Crystal Creek provides nutritional supplements and animal health aids for livestock across the United States and Canada and was founded by husband and wife team Dan and Jan Leiterman in 1997. In 2012, their son Dr. Ryan, joined the family business as the company's staff veterinarian and newest business partner.

Crystal Creek's birth, like some notable companies, was in a garage. It relocated to a newly built 40-by-80-foot warehouse in Trego in

2001, which the Leiterman's thought was "way too big" once they moved the company into it.

Crystal Creek soon outgrew that, and a 17,000-square-foot office and warehouse were constructed in Spooner's industrial park in 2007. It, too, seemed enormous at the time.

"I remember moving inventory from our garage in Prescott to our 3,200-square-foot warehouse in Trego," Ryan said, "it hardly filled up any of the space. My dad looked at me and said, 'I think we built this way too big.' Now that statement has become the running joke in our family. Every time we build a bigger warehouse, we think we built it way too big, and then a few years later we are running out of space again."

The latest addition, a 31,820-square-foot heated

warehouse with portions of it spanning 30 feet high, is expected to be completed by September.

Built by Northwest Builders of Rice Lake and using all local labor, the project will provide jobs for more than 100 skilled tradesmen during the course of construction and will greatly multiply Crystal Creek's capacity from the current 12,000-square-foot warehouse.

The Leitermans planned for growth from the start with the construction of their office and warehouse in Spooner, from the size of the five-acre lot, to the watershed management plan, to placement of the parking lot; everything was planned for expansion. The current office space can be tripled in size if needed in the future.

"It's all been set up for expansion, even back in 2007 we were planning for future

office, warehouse, parking lot and loading dock space," Ryan said.

How did they know they would expand?

"We didn't," Jan said. "We hoped."

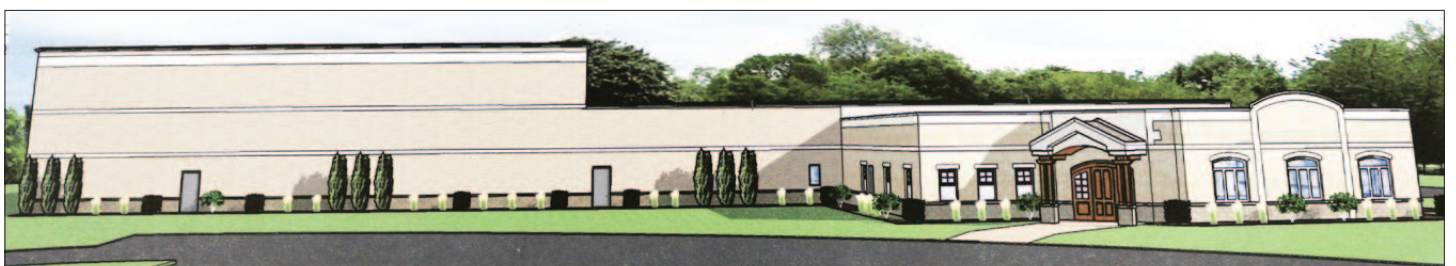
The company has 14 employees, with two of them added just this year due to growth.

Ryan said the company has experienced strong sales growth every year, with especially robust growth over the past year.

"I think that's profound," he said, "and I think we're very fortunate to have that experience."

Dan is very optimistic about the future.

"It's a wonderful opportunity," he said. "We're being well-received in the market. We hire people that are enthusiastic and they want to make a difference supporting agriculture and farm



families. That optimism feeds on itself.”

Feeding the growth

“This company is growing because we have an amazing team of people,” Ryan said, “and that team of people includes our staff, vendors, and customers.”

Not only is Crystal Creek part of the customers’ team, the Leitermans are friends that get invited to customers’ weddings and receive Christmas cards and birth announcements from them.

“We’re family,” Jan said.

All of the Leitermans attribute their company’s growth to a team attitude and innovative products geared toward what the customers need for healthy, productive livestock.

“A lot of our clients really appreciate what’s offered here because they’re innovative themselves,” Dan said. “They want to learn. They’re planning for their future. They’re looking to build a team of people that can contribute and help them with their goals.”

Inside Crystal Creek’s lobby is a sign quoting Vala Afshar: “We are not a team because we work together ... We are a team because we respect, trust & care for each other.”

“To me, that sign describes Crystal Creek’s relationship with our staff, vendors, and clients,” Ryan said. “We focus a lot on putting the energy and investment up front. We put the energy, the time, the investment into building a good team, and it yields better results down the road. We put the energy, the time, the money up front in constructing a nice building because it is consistent with our company’s theme.”

When people compliment Crystal Creek on its building, Dan tells them, “You should meet the team of people who work here; they are what make this building special.”

New venture

The company’s focus is helping the customer grow more sustainable, healthy animals, which helps lead to more productivity and thus greater profitability for the producers.

“We have a lot of competition, but what keeps us ahead in the market is innovation,” Dan said. “We have better innovation, better problem solving.”



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Crystal Creek owners (from left) Ryan, Jan, and Dan Lieterman display the plans for their new warehouse addition, which will almost triple the overall size of the office and warehouse headquarters in Spooner.

That sense of staying ahead of the curve extends beyond the nutrition to the broader area of year-round calf barn ventilation through the patent-pending fan and duct designs called FLIP DUCT® and FLAP DUCT® that Ryan invented. More producers are building barns to house their calves, especially for the frigid winters, and these ventilation technologies give producers greater control over providing fresh air to the calves during all seasons.

That project has brought together Ryan’s personal expertise and background in agricultural engineering and veterinary medicine and merged it with the company’s livestock health and nutrition emphasis.

“There are multiple things that make our company unique, but the ventilation is one aspect in which we are able to provide services that no other company can,” he said.

The ventilation portion of the business potentially could take root overseas.

“There’s a very strong market for calf barn ventilation in Europe right now, and we’re in the process of seeking international patents in addition to our domestic patents,” Ryan said. “We’ve been approached by an international company about bringing on this technology overseas. The new technologies have been very well received by the market and we are all excited for the future.”

“Opportunity and hard work are what make our company successful,” Jan said. “When there’s an op-

portunity, we dig in and we make it work. When opportunities present themselves, we work hard to see an idea through to completion.”

It took confidence, and plenty of capital investment, for the family-owned business to plunge into the new venture.

Nutrition

According to Ryan, Crystal Creek’s philosophy is “How can we help our customers the most?”

What that tells the producer, he said, is that Crystal Creek is there as a team member, not a salesman, and that fosters long-term relationships.

“Another key aspect of our nutrition is that we not only try to look at getting good performance with the animals but to do it with healthy animals,” Dan said. “And to keep them healthy in a sustainable manner, long-term production is part of the formula.”

He said the people appreciate the company’s vision. “We’re not out after the short-term, immediate gratification of a sale or a bump up in production. We’re looking at what is a good, sound, long-term business decision for our customer’s businesses.”

“It’s very satisfying,” Dan added.

Part of the benefit for the livestock is that Crystal Creek’s formulations use high-quality, bio-available ingredients, Jan said.

That has numerous advantages. Poultry research, for example, has shown that birds given more bio-available feed produce more nu-

tritious meat and eggs.

“We think it is very important to educate our clients,” Jan said.

Marketing – including a website and a comprehensive glossy catalog – has helped get that information out to local producers and beyond, but much of Crystal Creek’s growth has come through word of mouth from satisfied customers.

Being a small, family-owned business, Crystal Creek can respond rapidly when new technologies and product ideas surface. Ryan said, “We have a good network of suppliers and vendors who support us with the industry’s latest research and product/ingredient ideas.”

The companies they partner with have strong research, resources, and technology behind them, matched with business philosophies shared by Crystal Creek.

While Crystal Creek has moved in the past, the Leitermans say they love being in Spooner, with its high quality of life and the outdoors, welcoming community, attractiveness to families, and business-friendly support. Their new warehouse is a commitment to the community as well as their customers.

“Life is a ride and you just need to hang on tight,” Dan said. “We are really excited about the direction that Crystal Creek is going.”

More information

More information on Crystal Creek is at crystalcreeknatural.com.