

MATERIAL HANDLING WHOLESALER

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Colson Caster — Celebrating 125 years

MARY GLINDINNING

Even in the digital age, the wheel still keeps the world rolling along.

"There is still that demand for non-powered type movement," said Don Laux, president and general manager of Colson Caster Corp. Celebrating its 125th year in business, Colson isn't reinventing the wheel. But it is continually modifying wheels and casters to customer specifications.

"Believe me, there are more than I could ever imagine," Laux said. "We have more than 35,000 caster and wheel combinations already, and there's always someone looking for something different. Every company wants to be the first with a new product. To me, it's not so much that it's a new product. It's a modification of an existing product. We keep on listening and responding to the needs."

Colson Caster Corporation is the largest manufacturer of caster and wheel products in the world. The company began in 1885 in Worthington, Ohio, making tricycles, invalid chairs and wheelchairs. In 1953, Chicago-based lawyer and businessman Jay Pritzker and his brother Bob, an engineer, bought the company and moved it to Jonesboro, Ark. Various mergers and acquisitions created a worldwide company.

It is celebrating its birthday all year long because "that's a long time," Laux said. Plans call for a cookout that includes current and retired employees, an office facelift and installation of a history wall to display its heritage. Colson reached the 125-year milestone because people put their shoulder to the wheel in running the company and making the products, he said.

"Everybody respects everybody's job. If someone runs the heat furnace, that person is the expert on that," Laux said. "We give everybody respect for what they do. They know what they are doing."

The company has 88 employees, about half in the office and half in the manufacturing plant. Last year, replacement of an aging and overpowered air processing unit in the 150,000 sq. ft. plant cut energy costs by 25 percent, resulted in a 3-year payback, cut noise levels and saved 700 gallons of oil a year. Colson employees are now looking for more money-saving changes at every level of operation, from using recycled paper for packing and printing to monitoring lights and electronics in unoccupied areas.

Part of the corporate culture, lead by Bob Pritzker, is to give back to the community, which the company does every year through a committee that includes employees. This year, a new way to give back came up. The company funded a \$1,200 scholarship for the training of a nurse to allow local sexual and physical abuse examinations for children to be conducted in Jonesboro.

Previously, children had to travel 2 hours to Little Rock for the exams. Children who have already suffered now don't need to endure a long trip, Laux said. In addition to the care and comfort of the child, the exams help law enforcement with the prosecution of child abuse cases. Pinwheels in Colson's yard the day of the announcement showed the stunning number of children who need the service, Laux said. There also are happier ways the company serves children, by supplying casters and wheels for book carts, industrial baby cribs and even battery-driven rolling shoes.

While keeping industry rolling smoothly, Colson is a serious global business, even at 125. Colson isn't too old to

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While keeping industry rolling merrily along is a serious global business, even at 125, Colson isn't too old to help with child's play.

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