



**S&W Manufacturing** • 216 South Evergreen Street • Bensenville, IL 60106  
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# Made in America Means Getting It Done Better, Faster For This Midwest Company

By Ginger Wheeler

**T**he year is 1977. The US economy is in recession. The oil crisis is looming. And, disco has swept the nation. Warren Burr, a retired self-taught inventor and machinist with a knack for making metal parts that companies need, made the decision to go back into business for himself. For the next 20 years his new company, S&W Manufacturing, Inc., would ride the Pac Man wave and the growth of the U.S. gaming industry. In the early-1990s, Burr retired again, and handed the reigns over to his son, William J. (Bill) Burr. Bill, who had grown up in the business, kicked off a new era for S&W: an era of innovation, cost controls, and unprecedented growth. Thirty years later, S&W Manufacturing Company, Inc. is a leading supplier to OEM producers worldwide, providing a wide array of in-stock leveling mounts, spring plungers and hand retractable devices, as well as custom order parts that can be delivered in less than three weeks.

"When I started in the business," recalls Bill Burr, "We just built and shipped custom parts. We had about nine employees, a building, and dozens of machines, but no processes, no real management or leadership. My dad was the kind of guy who loved to tinker and make things, a true inventor. When I took over, we kept that tinkering spirit alive, but we expanded it to include a warehouse full of high-demand items that could be shipped immediately. We purchased technology that simplified production. We applied for and received patents on our innovations. We streamlined our product offerings to increase our productivity, and we took measures to keep our costs way down.

"It's a formula that's working. My goal is to be the most competitive supplier of our core products in the world," he says.

Those products include spring plungers, hand retractable devices, knobs, and a vast array of leveling mounts. Humble parts in the scheme of any OEM's grand plan, but nevertheless crucial components where quality construction and dependable delivery make a difference for customers.

"I first met Bill seven years ago at a trade show," recalls John Winkler, C.E.O. Office of the President for Wisconsin-based J.W. Winco, Inc. an OEM parts supplier, "But I meet a lot of people at trade shows. There was just something about Bill that was different. He stood out and that made me remember him. We've been doing business together ever since."

Winkler continues, "Everything today is about quick delivery and a competitive price. J.W. Winco, Inc. is known for this. S&W helps us do that because of their unique manufacturing processes and the cost controls that they have in place. Plus it gives us special pleasure to know we're supporting a company that has great pricing in place, and is made in America."

Indeed, Burr says manufacturing in America is his secret for getting things done on time and affordably for customers. "We tried outsourcing product overseas for a time. But we found that the quality wasn't there. The metals they used were inferior in strength and resiliency to the metals we use. The measurements on the threads weren't as

precise, and shipping was a nightmare. We couldn't control when and where we would get product. It was one headache after another, and truthfully, it cost us *more* than making the products right here in Bensenville."

S&W is nestled in a little tree-lined business neighborhood just steps from O'Hare International



*S&W Manufacturing stocks thousands of leveling mounts, spring plungers, and other items, but has also mastered the ability to produce specials on short notice.*



*Hand retractable products are a growing portion of S&W's warehousing business.*

Airport and one of the world's busiest ground shipping hubs. With more than 30,000 square feet, triple what the company had when Burr took over the business, S&W is physically situated to stock thousands of parts and get them out the door using the most economical and efficient shipping in the world. The location facilitates accepting raw materials, as well as delivering finished goods.

By manufacturing near ground and air shipping lanes, with plenty of warehousing space, S&W Manufacturing is able to employ more than fifty people, providing good pay and a convenient commute.

"I have worked for S&W for nearly twenty-five years," says Rosario Moscota, S&W's secondary parts foreman, "My job has enabled me to buy a home nearby, put my kids through school, and support my family. We have meetings here to discuss our work and how we can work better and smarter. I'm truly living the American dream thanks to S&W Manufacturing."

"We know that turn-around time is a key component to our success," says Burr, "We engage and empower the employees to make a contribution. By giving employees a stake in the success of the company, we are able to be leaner and more streamlined, and have better quality control."

Brandon Forney, General Manager for W.T. Hight Company, Inc. an international industrial distributor, says S&W's American roots and manufacturing make the difference in delivery for custom order parts that make a difference in his profitability. "S&W can turn around a custom order sample in less than a week. A full order can be shipped in less than three weeks. That's unheard of in foreign factories - overseas is twelve weeks minimum."

W.T. Hight has carved out a niche in the medical equipment industry, where stainless steel is a requirement for sanitary reasons. No matter the specs, S&W can deliver he says.

Forney also acknowledges the contribution of S&W's staff, "Don (Secor) and Barb (Kimes) have years of experience and I can always get a live person at S&W when I call. They are a pleasure to deal with," he says.

Those people skills have not only resulted in a better product for customers, and a better overall customer

experience, but also in recognition from its business neighbors. S&W Manufacturing was named the 2006 Business of the Year by the Bensenville Chamber of Commerce & Industry. It was an honor that garnered press attention and local government praise.

More praise came when S&W led an annual toy drive at Christmastime for children who are confined to Children's Memorial Hospital in Chicago. More attention came from local reporters, and accolades from animal rights groups, for rescuing a malnourished stray kitten, nursing it back to health, and giving "Buddy" a permanent home at S&W's corporate offices on Evergreen Street, recently opened in 2006.



*The portable Thread Checker was developed after in-house usage demonstrated a high demand for the device. The Wall Mounted version reached customers last year.*



*S&W opened its new corporate headquarters in Bensenville, Illinois in 2006. The company now owns 30,000 sq. ft. of space for manufacturing, warehousing, and shipping.*

Due to that building's purchase and expansion in 2006, S&W Manufacturing has room to grow. But while that managed growth occurs, Burr is using S&W's excess space as a business incubator, allowing fledgling companies an opportunity to share S&W's resources while they start up and grow. An advertising business and an importing business are currently thriving under S&W's generosity and foresight. Burr's only demand: turn out the lights on your way home and grow.

Burr hopes the business incubator side of S&W will allow more job creation, and a little more sharing of the American dream for others.

Burr is modest about all the attention. "We're just trying to do the right thing," he says, "We want to leave this world a little better off than when we came into it."

That attitude filters down to the people that comprise S&W Manufacturing, who use their own skills to improve the world of their customers.

Customers like California Caster and Hand Truck Company, Inc. have taken notice, "S&W is a good company to work with," says Mike McClure, general manager, "They offer friendly, knowledgeable customer support, good products, and pretty much get it to us before they say they will.

"They also make a lot of specials for us - pretty much anything we need they can make it. Because California Casters is in northern California, we do a lot with the computer industry. Often our customers want a certain size and something special. Also, in the semiconductor industry, a lot of people need special lengths and special sizes. And they want it yesterday. S&W helps us meet the needs of our customers. We are

truly partners in delivering quality components at a good price," says McClure.

While spring plungers, hand retractables, and leveling mounts are always in stock, S&W has mastered the process of tweaking these items for special orders and in creating new items in a short amount of time. Bill Burr: "We know that companies are constantly innovating. So are we. If we can find a product that is new, meets a defined market need, and has a buyer, we will build it, make room for stock, and get it out the door in a few weeks."

That innovative spirit has led to the development of such unique items as the Thread Checker® and the Wall Mounted Thread Checker™. The Thread Checker assists engineers and others by providing a portable means for quick and accurate measuring for both standard and metric thread sizes for fasteners of all kinds. First devised for in-house use, S&W quickly realized there was an enormous outside need for the Thread Checker and developed a way to mass produce and ship the product for others. The Thread Checker is a portable item, while the wall-mounted version, introduced this year, is designed to be customized with a customer's logo, and permanently installed in the customer's location of choice.

"The Wall Mounted Thread Checker brings customers into locations," says Don Secor, vice president of sales and operations for S&W Manufacturing, "It's easily installed on a wall, and attracts people who know what it can do."

S&W Manufacturing is the market leader in the manufacturing and creation of leveling mounts as a category. "Everything that is manufactured needs some type of foot pad," says Bill Burr, "We make every conceivable type of leveling mount foot pads with an infinite variety of functionality built in for leveling items such as conveyor machinery, game consoles, computer cabinets, storage cabinets, heavy machinery, major appliances, and more. The only manufactured product that doesn't


come with foot pads, comes with wheels, or it's designed for throwing," he laughs.

For leveling mounts, S&W has created innovative designs and been awarded several patents. S&W owns patents on the SnapLock® elastomer pad which can be applied to any number of its leveling mounts to prevent slippage, yet facilitate purposeful movement of heavy machinery. Additionally, S&W owns a patent on the PolyMount™ base which comes in a variety of sizes and features pop out lag-holes so that the leveling

mount can be bolted to a floor, or shipping container. The feature makes shipping heavy items safer and is also useful to better protect workers from heavy shifting machinery in the event of earthquakes or other natural disasters.

Secor says, "It's exciting to be part of a company and watch it grow and continue to grow. While our managed growth is planned, there's no ceiling in place."

Innovative, friendly, knowledgeable, customer-service oriented, fast, right-sized. This is the S&W Manufacturing of 2007, an organization developed after 30 years of meeting customer needs, but which also keeps that tinkering spirit of Mr. Warren Burr alive. "You just never know what S&W might come up with next," says Bill.

For more information regarding S&W Manufacturing, contact them at 216 South Evergreen Street, Bensenville, IL 60106; phone 888-LEVEL-IT; fax 630-595-5275; or visit their website at [www.swmanufacturing.com](http://www.swmanufacturing.com). 

*Ginger Wheeler is a Principal of GWiz Marketing Communications, a unit of Wheeler Sales & Marketing, Inc., an Illinois corporation. Wheeler's work has appeared in The Chicago Tribune, The Illinois School Board Journal, and numerous other publications and corporate newsletters nationwide. GWiz Marketing Communications enhances brands through the creation of advertising, print, and video communications for all types of companies.*



*Barb Kimes, or another employee, personally answer every phone call.*



*Buddy, who was rescued as a malnourished kitten, is now a permanent resident at S&W's corporate headquarters. (all 25 lbs. of him!)*



*S&W has made an annual event of encouraging all their business associates to take part in S&W's Children's Memorial Hospital Christmas Gift Drive.*