

## PINE CITY "GOES BETTER WITH COKE"

Nelsons' soft drink bottling company ~~first~~ located in Pine City in 1926. Beside the fact that the business provided local employment, Pine City benefited by having a family of real hometown boosters living here.

How appropriate it is that Art Nelson was chosen Pine City's 1982 Citizen of the Year, and his son Bill is heading up our big Heritage Celebration scheduled for the Labor Day weekend, Sept. 3, 4 and 5th. Their family has been an important part of Pine City history for over half a century.

Coca Cola is probably the most popular and well known soft drink in the world. It can be found anywhere in the world except Russia and Americans traveling abroad drink it instead of water.

Albert Nelson had a soft drink bottling company in Wittenberg, Wisconsin. As his sons grew up Albert wanted to expand his business so they could join him in the bottling business.

"It takes a considerable amount of experience to run a bottling business and dad was able to train us," Albesaid.

It was 1926 when ~~Art~~ Albert, accompanied by his sons Vern and Art came to Pine City to take a look at a bottling company that was for sale. They decided to buy and moved here that same year.

Sharp businessmen, the Nelsons' anticipated the boom in the popularity of Coca Cola when they bought their first franchise in 1935.

"We cover six and a half neighboring counties with our

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Pine City franchise," Art said. Other brothers picked up Coca Cola franchises in other states.

During the past 55 years the Nelsons' and two of their long time employees have seen many changes take place in the soft drink bottling industry.

"In 1926 our delivery system included one truck and we operated within a radius of 10 miles," Art said. " Now we run 20 trucks and cover a large territory."

During the 1930's the plant was a much simpler operation than it is today. The family all pitched in to help run things and deliver. Vern's wife Joyce recalls a Fourth of July celebration when she was dating Vern.

"I came down to Pine City for the celebration," she said. "It was a cold drizzly morning and a large crowd wasn't anticipated. By noon the sun came out and it turned terribly hot and humid. The town was filled with people. We started to run out of pop so Vern's mother and I had to hurry down to the plant, wash bottles with a revolving brush washer, bottle the pop with a foot powered bottling machine and label each container by hand. We managed to keep pace with the demand," she laughed.

It was a far cry from the sophisticated bottling equipment in the plant today. There is special equipment for the 10 and 16 ounce bottles and the big machine in full operation can put out 360 cases per hour.

Today Art is office manager, his son Bill has followed in his father's footsteps and is plant manager which makes it a third generation business. Jerry Hoefler is an employee who has been with the company for over 30 years became sales manager when Vern

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Nelson retired in 1973.

Many people don't realize that besides Coca Cola the Pine City plant bottles 7-Up, Dr. Pepper, a variety of diet drinks and all of the common pop flavors under the name of Sunrise soft drinks. "Ol Smoothie" root beer was developed right here in the Pine City plant by the Nelson family.

"We wanted to make a really good candy stick flavored root beer like the kind found at root beer stands," Vern said.

The Nelsons' vividly recall what it was like trying to deliver and sell their product when the roads were snowbound and spring mud made it almost impossible to get around.

"One time I got stuck in a bad storm on my way home from Grantsburg," Vern said. "I couldn't see, the snow was wet and heavy. I fell down and was so tired I just wanted to stay there but I knew I must get up and find shelter or I would freeze to death."

Vern made it to a farmhouse where he called Art for help.

"Art got out there with the little old rubber tired wooden spoked truck that came with the original plant and he got me out. I wish we had kept that old truck," Vern said.

It was not uncommon in the old days for the Nelson brothers to make their deliveries with a sled.~~and horses.~~

The old frame plant was remodeled and expanded to the present brick structure and what began as a family operation now employs over 40 persons.

The Nelsons' debated making the move to Pine City at first.

"We've been really happy that we made the move. Its been a good life here," Art said.

END