



# CHAMPIONS OF INNOVATION

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**Building Excellence**



## 2024: CELEBRATING INNOVATION

Whether you're a startup or a legacy company, innovation is at the heart of what makes businesses succeed. Champions of Innovation allows businesses to share their own stories of how they developed new products and processes that allowed their companies to grow. This special sponsored content section will inspire you as your business travels its own innovation journey.



# THINK BIG



At Miron Construction, safety, health, and well-being are at the center of everything we do. From innovative safety practices that include new helmets designed to better protect our workforce, to holistic wellness programs that prioritize both physical and mental health, Miron puts people first. We believe that true success begins and ends with those who build our communities from the ground up and make our clients' dreams a reality.

Together, we're *Building Excellence*.



STAY GROUNDED : THINK BIG : RALLY TOGETHER : DIG DEEP : BUILD LEGACIES

Check out [MIRON-CONSTRUCTION.COM](http://MIRON-CONSTRUCTION.COM) to learn more about Miron's culture and how we bring our clients' dreams to life!

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Waupaca Foundry leads the industry in prioritizing our natural resources, paving the way in the industry to becoming a Practical Green Foundry for over two decades. By 2030, Waupaca Foundry will reduce its Scope 1 and 2 carbon emissions by 25%. But it's not only about our commitment to sustainability. It's also about yours.

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[waupacafoundry.com](http://waupacafoundry.com)



**Brian Rasmussen**  
 Publisher, Insight Publications  
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As we embark on another year of celebrating innovation in Northeast Wisconsin, I am delighted to introduce Insight's annual Champions of Innovation special section. This section serves as a testament to the ingenuity and forward-thinking spirit that defines our region's business landscape.

The New North has long been a hotbed of innovation, where companies large and small continually push the boundaries of what is possible. From manufacturing to health care, technology to agriculture, our community thrives on the pursuit of new ideas and solutions. Champions of Innovation showcases the remarkable endeavors of these trailblazing organizations, told in their own words.

Within these pages, you will learn about the cutting-edge products, processes and initiatives that are shaping industries and transforming lives. From financial institutions increasing financial literacy to electrical contractors advancing electric vehicle infrastructure, each story exemplifies the spirit of innovation that propels Northeast Wisconsin forward.

But innovation is more than just a buzzword; it is a mindset — a commitment to continuous improvement and the courage to challenge the status quo. In the New North, innovation is ingrained in our DNA. It is evident in the way we approach problems, embrace change and foster a culture of creativity and exploration.

As publisher of Insight, I am honored to present this collection of inspiring stories that highlight the innovation happening right here in our own backyard.

Thank you for your continued support, and here's to another year of innovation and progress. 📌

*Brian Rasmussen*  
 insightonbusiness.com

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# Unlock Your Company's Full Potential

Start your journey to better performance

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**\$750k** cost savings

**28** jobs created or retained



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## Why relationships matter — every single day



Financial innovation today often evokes images of groundbreaking bank practices, automated tools and new technologies. At Fox Communities Credit Union, it's much more than that.

Innovation at Fox extends far beyond traditional banking and digital tools; it's deeply rooted in a dedication to build meaningful relationships and to support communities in non-traditional ways. Through close strategic partnerships with nonprofit organizations, Fox strives to enact significant change in the lives of many.

While financial institutions commonly provide support to nonprofits through donations or loans, Fox's approach goes further.

"We don't simply write a donation check or take care of a loan; we invest our time and unwavering dedication to helping the nonprofits we work with realize their visions. It ties to our mission to truly partner with our members, communities and Fox Family to build stronger financial futures," said Chris Allen, Fox's president and CEO.

In Oshkosh, Wisconsin, one such partnership exemplifies this spirit, where Fox collaborates closely with Day by Day Shelter, Inc. which provides temporary shelter, individualized services and opportunities for self-sufficiency to empower the most vulnerable adults in the community.

In 2020, at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, Fox was introduced to Molly Yatso-Butz, the new executive director of Day by Day.



Day by Day celebrating their ribbon cutting on Thursday, May 11, 2023.

Shortly after meeting, it became clear that Day by Day's six-month temporary space was not going to suffice to meet the overwhelming needs of the Oshkosh community. Amid the pandemic's shelter-in-place orders, the urgency for shelter grew.



Leading innovators to the Fox and Day by Day partnership: Jose Villa (Vice President Commercial Lending Fox Communities Credit Union), Gretchen Withers (Day by Day Board President), Lynn Marie Hopfensperger (Retired Community Development Officer Fox Communities Credit Union) and Molly Yatso-Butz (Day by Day Executive Director).

Day by Day persisted, seeking innovative solutions to serve those most vulnerable. Fox provided ongoing support, advice, education and had regular conversations with Day by Day leadership and their board.


Luckily, a grant covered half the funds for a new facility. And Fox offered a bridge loan to fill the gap, providing immediate capital for construction. With community support, Day by Day broke ground on a 50-bed year-round facility in June of 2022.

"It's the shared passion for helping people in our communities that leads

Fox to work with nonprofits for real partnerships; collaborating, learning and sharing with each other," said Jose Villa, VP commercial lending at Fox.

Molly Yatso-Butz, executive director at Day by Day, eloquently states, "Fox Communities Credit Union truly represents what community partnership means. The Day by Day Shelter is fortunate to have them as a friend and partner. We couldn't do what we do without the support of organizations like Fox and the people who work there."

In May 2023, Day by Day was able to open their new facility where they can concentrate on what matters — providing programs for their guests, which are largely focused on life skills, helping them achieve an independent lifestyle and the ability to care for themselves.

And while Fox provides Day by Day the financial tools to succeed, Day by Day also provides Fox the insight into what a working nonprofit organization needs as well as the financial needs of those who use their services. That is the true experience of a relationship every single day. 



Company: Fox Communities Credit Union

Innovation: Collaborating, learning and sharing with nonprofits for real partnerships

foxcu.org



Day by Day's new 50-bed shelter space opened to guests on May 15, 2023.

# Power your property: Unlock the potential of EV charging with Shea Electric's breezEV stations



As more people own electric vehicles (EVs), a win for sustainability, the consumer faces an inevitable challenge: The need for more comprehensive charging solutions in more locations. Being an early observer of this dramatic shift, Shea Electric & Communications, LLC took action to address this looming challenge.

The first step was to research charging unit options. Shea Electric promotes the breezEV charging stations. This move aims to support the establishment of a widespread EV charging network catering to property owners, businesses and

municipalities. Dan Shea, owner of Shea Electric & Communications, LLC, stated, "Drivers are looking for more chargers, and they expect to see them at work, businesses, schools and public places like parks or a shopping district."

As automotive manufacturers increase the production of EVs, this will only amplify the problem of not enough chargers in a community. The demand for accessible charging options will only grow over time. "EVs have grown in popularity, and the framework needs to be in place so drivers can get where they need to go," added Shea.

The breezEV charging station is recognized for its compatibility with all types of vehicles, making it a versatile solution for all drivers. "One important reason we like breezEV is how it works with any vehicle, and anyone can use it, unlike some charging stations that drivers need to have a membership with," Shea shared. It is also equipped with AmpUp, an advanced EV software that simplifies the management of multiple charging stations and locations. "The AmpUp mobile app alerts drivers when a nearby charger is available and uses Amp Reservations to schedule vehicle charging."



The breezEV charging system provides customers with a smart, simple charging experience. All vehicles can use the chargers and drivers do not need to be part of a special network to use them.

The breezEV's adoption of the Open Charge Point Protocol (OCPP) further sets it apart, offering operators flexibility, interoperability, scalability and future-proofing capabilities. This forward-thinking approach ensures businesses and municipalities investing in breezEV infrastructure have a scalable and technologically adaptive solution.

With statistics showing that most EV owners are interested in charging their vehicles at work and that people are more likely to remain loyal to eco-friendly companies, Shea Electric is positioned as a proactive partner in the EV charging sector. "We're ready to work with property owners, businesses and others to set up the necessary infrastructure for having EV chargers," Shea remarked. He further explained the inclusive nature of breezEV, stating that its universal compatibility and lack of membership requirements make it an ideal choice for public and private charging stations.

By introducing breezEV charging stations, Shea Electric & Communications, LLC is taking a significant step towards facilitating the adoption of electric vehicles, underscoring its commitment to sustainability and innovation in the electrical and communications industry.

Explore how Shea Electric & Communications, LLC is powering the future of EV charging at [www.sheaelectricllc.com](http://www.sheaelectricllc.com).



**Company:** Shea Electric & Communications, LLC

**Innovation:** breezEV charging stations  
[sheaelectricllc.com](http://sheaelectricllc.com)

# KI Furniture: Championing innovation with "Infinity From KI™"

In the ever-evolving world of business, organizations must continuously adapt and innovate to stay ahead.

KI, a world-class furniture manufacturer based in Green Bay, embodies this spirit of innovation with its groundbreaking process, Infinity From KI™. This agile, customer-centric approach allows businesses to partner with KI in designing custom furniture solutions tailored to their unique needs. No other furniture manufacturer can do this quite like KI.

## Infinity From KI™: A revolutionary design process

Infinity From KI™ is not just about creating furniture; it's about co-creating solutions that reflect each customer's distinct identity and requirements. Utilizing agile methodologies, this process involves a seamless continuum of design and manufacturing steps, enabling rapid conceptualization, iterative prototyping and flexible adaptation to bring customers' ideas to life efficiently and cost effectively.

At the heart of Infinity From KI™ is a deep commitment to collaboration. The process begins with understanding the customer's vision and needs. Customers engage directly with KI's designers, engineers and production teams, ensuring their input within every stage of development.

## Innovation through agility

Infinity From KI™ is designed to cater to the dynamic needs of modern organizations, particularly those in fast-paced industries such as advanced technology and financial



Infinity From KI™ allows customers to engage directly with KI's designers, engineers, and production teams, ensuring input with every stage of furniture development

services. These companies thrive on change and innovation, and KI's agile design process aligns perfectly with this culture. By breaking down the traditional product development process into adaptable phases, KI provides the freedom to explore "what if" scenarios, encouraging bold and innovative thinking.

The Infinity From KI™ process transforms ideas from simple sketches to tangible products. It begins with an immersive discovery phase, where KI's team engages with customers to understand their specific challenges and goals. This is followed by rapid development, where ideas are quickly turned into 3D drawings and prototypes, allowing for continuous feedback and refinement. The result is a high-quality, manufacturable product, perfectly tailored to the customer's needs.

## Delivering unique solutions

One of the most significant advantages of Infinity From KI™ is the ability to create solutions that are not just customized but also optimized for performance and cost effectiveness.

Whether it's a single unit or a large-scale production, each product is value-engineered to ensure the lowest cost of ownership while maximizing user satisfaction. This approach ensures that the final product is a perfect fit for the customer's space, brand and business objectives.

Infinity From KI™ is supported by a dedicated team of experts, including Jonathan Webb, director of workplace strategy; Lon Seidl, Infinity co-created product solutions manager; and

David Mommaerts, Infinity modified product solutions manager. Their extensive experience and strategic approach ensure that every project is executed with precision and creativity.

## True design freedom

Infinity From KI™ empowers customers with true design freedom, allowing them to explore innovative solutions that standard products cannot offer. This process not only supports productivity and cultural uniqueness but also helps businesses attract and retain talent by creating inspiring work environments.

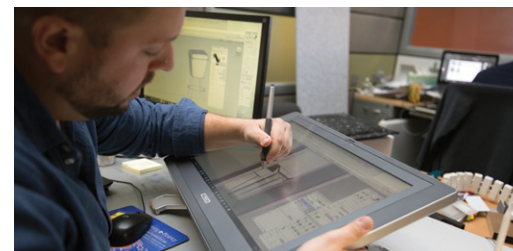
Infinity From KI™ exemplifies what it means to be a champion of innovation. By embracing agile principles and fostering deep collaboration with customers, KI delivers unique, high-quality furniture solutions that meet the ever-changing needs of modern organizations.

For more information or to start your own custom furniture design journey, contact KI at [infinityhelp@ki.com](mailto:infinityhelp@ki.com) or call 800-424-2432. Explore additional resources at [ki.com/infinity](http://ki.com/infinity).



**Company:** KI

**Innovation:** Infinity From KI™ - custom furniture solutions  
[ki.com/infinity](http://ki.com/infinity)



With Infinity From KI™, ideas are quickly turned into 3D drawings and rapid prototypes

# Innovation in construction



Where hard hats and heavy machinery dominate the industry, Miron Construction stands out not just for the structures it builds, but for its unwavering commitment to the well-being of its most prized assets: its team members. At the core of its principles lies a holistic approach to care, encompassing safety, wellness and the nurturing of mental and physical health. But this is not merely lip service – it's a deeply ingrained belief system that drives every decision and action taken by the company's leadership. From innovative safety protocols to comprehensive wellness programs, Miron is employee-centric, setting a new standard in an industry where people often take a backseat to progress. They understand that the true foundation of success lies in the welfare and happiness of those who build it.

## MiCare

Last year, Miron unveiled MiCare, an umbrella of clinics that provide accessible, free, quality care for non-union Miron office and yard operations employees and their families. MiCare provides primary, preventive and acute care services. There is an on-site clinic at Miron's corporate office, as well as a virtual appointment option, and a partner site that extends services to family members, including children 24 months of age and older. MiCare alleviates the stress that can accompany leaving work for an appointment or having limited access to standard clinics.



## Suicide Awareness and Prevention Training

Mental health is an extremely important topic and spans employees' personal and professional lives. Deeply rooted within the mental health discussion is the topic of suicide. The suicide rate in construction occupations is five times greater than any other work fatality and four times greater than the national average. QPR (*Question, Persuade, Refer*) Gatekeeper Training was introduced at Miron in January 2023, kickstarting the process of eliminating the stigma around suicide and mental health within Miron and the construction industry as a whole. To date, more than 460 employees encompassing office, field, and Yard Operations staff have completed the voluntary training with overwhelmingly positive feedback.

## Helmets for All

In 2023, Miron's ownership put forth an effort to better understand the idea of utilizing Type 2 hard hats (helmets) in the construction industry. Safety helmets, with the use of chinstraps, dramatically reduce the frequency and severity of traumatic brain injuries due to their retention systems and their ability to better protect the head against front, top, rear, and side impacts and penetration. In 2024, Miron will provide all team members with STUDDSON Type 2 helmets that meet desired performance standards and provide superior head protection in comparison to standard hard hats.

## MULEs

Speaking of physical safety, Miron invested in several MULEs, or Material Unit Lift



Enhancers, in 2021. MULEs make large blocks feel nearly weightless and protect masons from excess wear and tear on their bodies by reducing the risk of back strains and other injuries. This innovation has revolutionized how masons working on Miron project sites handle heavy materials, ensuring that every lift is as easy as the first.

For Miron, success is not measured solely by the heights of its buildings or the breadth of its projects, but by the strength and resilience of its workforce. The team reinforces the notion that a company is only as strong as the people who comprise it. In a world where profits often overshadow people, Miron stands as a testament to the transformative power of prioritizing humanity above all else. 📌



**Building Excellence**

**Company:** Miron Construction Co., Inc.

**Innovations:** MiCare, Helmets for All, MULEs and QPR

[miron-construction.com](http://miron-construction.com)

# Martin Systems' technology solutions answer the call for enhanced safety & security



Life safety is serious business, and at Martin Systems we've been taking that business very seriously for the past 50 years. It has been our responsibility and privilege to consistently provide best-in-class security, fire and life safety technology solutions.

As technological advancements continue to evolve, so too have we. One thing that hasn't changed is the need for a security alarm system to transmit emergency signals to the monitoring station in the event of an emergency. These signals are what trigger a swift response. What has changed is the way these signals need to be transmitted. The FCC is calling for the retirement of traditional plain old telephone service, a.k.a., POTS, to next-gen technologies. Martin Systems is keeping cellular conversions in motion by partnering with Bongo Technologies to provide customers

with a POTS replacement solution for their life safety phone lines. "Together with our technology partner Bongo Technologies, Martin Systems is providing emergency phone line replacement solutions that enable customers to continuously keep emergency communications active for both new and legacy life safety equipment," says Cory Peters, president and owner of Martin Systems. Martin Systems' proactive approach to transitioning users from analog to cellular emergency response is just one way we stay ahead of the curve in equipping customers with the most cutting edge security technology and life safety solutions. From alarm monitoring to access control, video surveillance, intrusion detection and fire systems design and installation, our trusted expertise and experience has earned us our reputation as an industry-leading provider of security and safety solutions for five decades. 📌



**Company:** Martin Systems  
**Innovation:** Security, fire and life safety  
[martinsystems.com](http://martinsystems.com)

# SmartSolve and Sure Controls: pioneering sustainable packaging

The manufacturing industry is experiencing a profound shift towards sustainability, with companies seeking innovative solutions to reduce their environmental footprint. One such trailblazer is SmartSolve, a company that has developed groundbreaking bio-based, water-soluble packaging technologies.

## The SmartSolve solution

To bring their vision to life, SmartSolve acquired a 30-inch extrusion coater from a Canadian company that had previously used the machine to run similar products. By bringing this technology in-house, SmartSolve aimed to enhance its continuous product development and production capacity.

## Sure Controls: The integration experts

To seamlessly integrate the extrusion coater into their operations, SmartSolve partnered with Sure Controls, a company well-known for its expertise in integration solutions. The scope of the project encompassed

various elements, including:

- Operational coating line:** Sure Controls provided an operational coating line and executed knowledge transfer, empowering SmartSolve to internally manage the extrusion manufacturing process.
- Superior project management:** Through weekly correspondence, Sure Controls managed the project status, schedule and resources to ensure on-time implementation.
- Clear documentation:** Sure Controls developed and provided all relevant electrical schematics, HMI programming with instructions and recipe files.

Sure Controls takes pride in enabling customers to enhance their manufacturing excellence, efficiency and sustainability. The success of this project marks a milestone for both SmartSolve and Sure Controls. 📌



Make sure to scan the QR code to see the machine in action and learn how SmartSolve and Sure Controls are propelling the mission to pioneer zero-waste packaging technologies.



**Company:** Sure Controls Inc.™  
**Innovation:** The SmartSolve solution  
[surecontrols.com](http://surecontrols.com)

# Solutions for 3 potential pitfalls regarding automating manufacturing processes

Authors: Stephen Smiley, Colin Wilson & ChatGPT

Automation has transformed the landscape of manufacturing, promising increased efficiency and precision, as well as reduced costs. However, beneath the surface of these advantages lie potential pitfalls that can derail automation projects. We'll explore three reasons why an automation initiative in manufacturing may face challenges and how companies can navigate these pitfalls.

## 1. Inadequate planning and foundational work:

One of the primary reasons automation projects stumble is inadequate planning and ignoring process improvement best practices. Rushing into automation without a comprehensive understanding of the existing processes and a clear roadmap can lead to misalignment between technology and operations. Lack of coordination with different departments and insufficient training for the workforce can result in resistance to change. Successful automation requires meticulous planning, including thorough process mapping, technology assessment and a well-defined integration strategy to ensure seamless collaboration between automated systems and human workers.

### Pitfall solutions:

- **Value stream map** – Evaluating

the process flow to identify waste and opportunities for improvement to streamline the process

- **TWI job instructions & standard work** – Processes need standard work and methodologies; lack of standard work can cause waste and decrease productivity, and using standard work instructions can help the manufacturing process be more effective
- **Operational Excellence Best Practices** – The foundational work upon which can be built
- **Project Definition & Management** – Using a project charter to define the project scope, steps and responsibilities

## 2. Technology limitations and complexity:

While the allure of cutting-edge technology is strong, it's crucial to acknowledge the potential limitations and complexities associated with it. Adopting overly sophisticated automation solutions can lead to unforeseen challenges. Integration issues, software bugs and the need for constant maintenance can disrupt production schedules. It's essential for companies to strike a balance between adopting advanced technologies and ensuring that the chosen automation tools align with the specific needs of the manufacturing process. Regular updates, training programs and

continuous monitoring can help mitigate the risks associated with technology limitations.

### Pitfall solutions:

- **Risk management** – Assessing the risk of a potential project and planning mitigation strategies to manage the risk; this includes initial engineering development testing to validate risky technologies and developing vendor standards
- **Automation skill set assessment** – Identify skills required to support the technology, assess employee aptitude, and identify required training to bridge any gaps

## 3. Resistance to change and workforce adaptation:

Perhaps one of the most underestimated challenges in automation is the resistance to change from the existing workforce. Automation often brings about a fear of job displacement, and employees may be hesitant to embrace new technologies. To overcome this hurdle, companies must invest in effective change management strategies, including communication, training and re-skilling programs. Involving employees in the automation process, highlighting the benefits and demonstrating how automation can enhance their roles can foster a positive attitude toward change, ensuring a smoother transition and long-term success.

### Pitfall solutions:

- **Change management** – Significant initiatives need a change management program to help employees through the change process; 60% of projects fail due to a lack of managing change
- **Frontline leader skill development** – Frontline leaders have a dramatic effect on employees' understanding and adoption of major initiatives;



good frontline leaders can help employees through the change process

- **TWI job instructions & standard work** – Processes need standard work and methodologies, as lack of standard work can cause confusion and frustration on the shop floor; using standard work instructions can help employees be more effective
- **Blended learning & training** – Using online and in-person training can educate employees on automation and project management, as well as reinforce the change process; this knowledge will increase success of projects and reduce employee frustration

In conclusion, while the benefits of automating manufacturing processes are significant, it's essential for companies to approach automation projects with caution and strategic planning. Addressing issues related to planning, technology integration and workforce adaptation will pave the way for successful automation initiatives, ensuring that the promise of increased efficiency and productivity is realized without succumbing to potential pitfalls.

**Stephen Smiley, Business Transformation Service Line Leader** Stephen is a seasoned executive leader specializing in visionary strategy development and practical implementation, driving success across organizations. With a robust

background in international, multi-facility operations, he guides teams toward operational excellence and strategic alignment. Stephen's leadership extends across various industries, including heavy equipment, consumer products and aerospace.



Stephen Smiley

**Colin Wilson, Service Line Leader – Senior Consultant Automation Services** Colin's experience in automation spans nearly two decades. His roles have included component selection/sizing, field service, applications development for custom equipment, and technical system sales for a component manufacturer. Colin has worked with small manufacturers just starting down the automation path, through multinational corporations optimizing their value stream.



Colin Wilson

## Who is WMEP Manufacturing Solutions?

WMEP Manufacturing Solutions is dedicated to the growth and success of small and mid-sized Wisconsin manufacturers. As a private non-profit organization, our mission is entirely centered on driving positive results for our clients. Each year, our team of

manufacturing experts collaborates with hundreds of manufacturers, working closely with them to design and implement effective solutions that tackle their most pressing challenges. With decades of industry experience, a wide range of services and a deep passion for manufacturing, we consistently deliver a high return on investment for our clients.

WMEP Manufacturing Solutions is part of the MEP National Network™, a public-private partnership that advances U.S. manufacturing. MEP Centers are located in all 50 states and draw on the talents of more than 1,400 trusted advisors and experts.

On every client engagement we are evaluated on the results we produce, as well as our client's satisfaction with our services. We are very proud to be excelling on both metrics. Since 1996 the WMEP has assisted more than 4,000 SMMs, resulting in \$6.48 billion in economic impact and 26,518 jobs that have been created or retained. In 2023 alone, WMEP helped Wisconsin manufacturers generate \$1.01 billion in economic impact, with 1,474 jobs being created or retained. 📌



Company: WMEP Manufacturing Solutions

Innovation: Automated manufacturing processes

www.wmep.org

# Navigating the digital transformation journey



Werner Electric's subject matter experts can help you collect and analyze data to improve manufacturing processes.



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Our technical experts have years of experience and can provide guidance and training on the latest technologies. The Innovation Center has provided our customers a place to investigate solutions to their specific issues with

our team, in turn experiencing less downtime on their plant floors. Work with our experts in the Innovation Center to advance your operation.

### People and Processes

At Werner Electric, our people are what make the difference. We are staffed with technical and subject-matter experts in a range of fields, from software and sustainability to networks, robotics and beyond. We're not just selling products in a box. We're offering comprehensive solutions designed to elevate customers' operations, driving both productivity and profitability.

Our team plays a crucial role in guiding manufacturing organizations through their digital transformation journeys. Here are a few ways we collaborate with our customers:

- **Assessment and Strategy Development:** Our experts evaluate the current state of your organization's operations, technology and procedures. Our subject-matter experts assist in creating a strategic implementation plan and offer you competitive solutions.
- **Technology Selection and Integration:** Keeping your company's goals and budget constraints in mind, our experts will guide you in selecting the right digital tools and technologies. We can provide oversight of the integration of these technologies into your existing systems, providing support and training as needed.

We understand how critical digital transformation is in manufacturing. Businesses have been relying on automation for years, and integrating new operational technology into an existing ecosystem can mean big gains for both the business and the customer. It's not just about adopting the latest technology; the transformation includes thinking differently, using innovation, and having the right people and processes in place to meet company goals and stay competitive in the ever-evolving marketplace.

This comprehensive approach to manufacturing connects the physical with digital, allowing for better collaboration and real-time access across departments, partners, vendors, products and people.

### Thinking Differently

Digital transformation in manufacturing provides the opportunity for businesses to innovate, optimize processes, and drive productivity and profitability. We understand the complexities of this transformation and recognize the significance of having the right combination of people, processes and tools for success.

Located at our headquarters in Appleton, the Werner Electric Innovation Center offers an interactive environment where you can simulate processes and explore technologies that can digitally transform your operations. We acknowledge that investing in innovative technology can sometimes seem like a leap into the unknown, and new challenges arise every day.

- **Process Optimization:** Our specialists will examine and optimize your processes, spotting inefficiencies and bottlenecks, and recommend solutions to address these issues. This leads to increased productivity, quality and safety in manufacturing processes.
- **Data Management and Analytics:** We will assist you in the design of data collection systems and analytics frameworks, helping you collect and analyze real-time data from manufacturing processes and facilitating better decision-making, trend spotting, and maintenance and production forecast requirements to give you a competitive edge.



The Werner Electric Innovation Center provides customers the opportunity to explore new technology and digital tools.

### Navigating Digital Transformation Together

Our customers' digital transformation journey is a top priority. We're committed to modernizing manufacturing operations statewide, boosting efficiency and driving profitability. Through strong customer relationships and trust, we craft tailored solutions to achieve their digital transformation goals. 📌



Company: Werner Electric Supply

Innovation: Digital transformation solutions and consultation

wernerelectric.com

# Settlers best Credit Union sets new standard for personalized banking



CHAMPIONS  
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People-forward approach puts members first, tailoring solutions to meet needs



experts across the organization and empowered our customer service team to provide member support via text in addition to more traditional service delivery channels. Innovations in cross-training mean that 95% of callers can expect that their questions will be addressed and issues resolved at the initial

point of contact. Our commitment to providing members with easy access to information has remained strong, and we continually seek out new tools that empower members to connect with us in their preferred ways.

*"We continually challenge our team to engage in fresh thinking to introduce less traditional opportunities that yield better results."*

— Michael Waters

The founders of Settlers bank employed their "best people, best technology" philosophy when chartering the bank in 2007. The result was *banking made easier* through accessibility and customized solutions. Since joining forces with Wings Financial Credit Union and becoming Settlers best Credit Union in 2023, Settlers has focused on identifying the most value-added aspects of Settlers and Wings operations to spur innovations that support the best possible offerings and experience for members.

Since becoming Settlers best, we have taken a fresh look at our staffing model. This review led to redefining departments to ensure collaborative support and address member needs holistically. We have introduced some fresh technology in transactional areas to streamline the client experience. We've enhanced our online presence by introducing a financial wellness



Michael Waters  
President

component to help members better monitor their finances. We've expanded remote connectivity to allow onsite visitors to connect with subject matter

Our seasoned team of professionals has a reputation for creatively bridging gaps between clients' needs, looking beyond "the box," and finding solutions for those whose situations may fall outside the static parameters of standardized programs offered by other financial institutions. Our ever-increasing ability to access and mine data sets the stage for exceeding members' expectations. It equips us to take a more proactive role in the member journey by uncovering trends and patterns and forecasting future needs. As we delve more deeply into the data, we discover previously untapped information that will further enhance our ability to customize our offerings.

Advances in technology and more readily accessible data support our cross-departmental approach to addressing member needs within the context of the complete relationship; business, treasury management, mortgage, and personal/private banking.

New communication methods and the increased ability to connect from anywhere enhance our practice of working as a team with members to properly analyze what they want to accomplish and how best to do so. This collaborative approach sets us apart from the traditional model, where siloed departments make decisions behind closed doors with little engagement with their members.

Sb Mortgage, which celebrated 10 years of operation in April 2024, launched with the market's premier online application. A more recent innovation of Sb Mortgage was the added option of hybrid closings. This option allows borrowers to eSign many of their documents before the in-person closing, demonstrating our unwavering commitment to continuous improvement and our dedication to providing the best possible service to our members.

While we treasure our past and value the experience represented across our team, "the way we've always done it" is not a part of the Settlers vernacular. We continually challenge our team to engage in fresh thinking to introduce less traditional opportunities that yield better results. 📌



a division of Wings Financial Credit Union

Company: Settlers best Credit Union

Innovation: Creative solutions that make banking easier

settlerswi.com

# Givens Farm offers a wealth of innovative opportunities



Originally envisioned as a family home by Jim and Mariann Sykes in 2008, Givens Farm has since blossomed into so much more. Today, as the importance of mental well-being in the workplace gains momentum, companies increasingly turn to Givens Farm as the venue for one-of-a-kind meetings and team-building retreats.

Jim and Mariann view this trend as a tremendous positive for the local workforce and hope Givens Farm will continue to lead the way in innovation and sustainability practices under new ownership.

“Owning a corporate retreat can truly transform employee well-being,” explains Nikol Waters, First Weber Real Estate expert. “It’s about providing a space where individuals can recharge and reconnect in a cozy environment that exudes warmth and comfort.”

From falconry demonstrations to yoga retreats, Givens Farm currently offers a wide range of activities aimed at reawakening the mind, body and spirit.

Mariann Sykes emphasizes the property’s transformative power,

saying, “By embracing the land and intentionally adding elements that bring people together, we’ve created a space where companies can invest in their teams and clients, and be rewarded with enhanced relationships and productivity.”

According to Waters, owning a corporate retreat reflects a company’s values. “It’s about more than just hosting one-off events; it’s about crafting an experience that embodies your commitment to customers and stakeholders,” she says. “When you invest in a retreat aligned with your values, you create a special space at the intersection of work and well-being.”

For more information about Givens Farm, contact Nikol Waters, First Weber Real Estate Expert, at 920-562-1072 or watersn@firstweber.com. Scan the code to embark on your journey of innovation and inspiration.



## OWN A ONE-OF-A-KIND EVENT VENUE

Continue the Givens Farm legacy of outstanding hospitality

Capture this rare opportunity to create and host memorable events at one of the area’s premier properties. Loaded with old-world charm and limitless potential, Givens Farm is a small business owner’s dream.

The possibilities are as vast as this extraordinary estate. From hosting retreats and team-building exercises to offering an idyllic backdrop for weddings and curating boutique-style events, the canvas is as endless as your imagination.

### Commercial Opportunities:

- Private and public events
- Corporate retreats
- Wellness retreats
- Land stewardship
- Animal husbandry
- Fruit orchards
- Indoor winter vegetable and herb cultivation
- Indoor and outdoor entertainment areas including a unique bridge (pictured) and rooftop entertaining



**Company:**  
Nikol Waters, First Weber Realtors®

**Innovation:**  
Corporate well-being unequaled

N2828GivensRd.com

# Innovation — alive and well in our New North Region



New North initiated the NEW Launch Alliance to create a more connected, robust, resourceful, and productive entrepreneurial ecosystem in Northeast Wisconsin. This strategy is key to building a vibrant economy that drives employment growth, expands career options, leverages innovation and ensures long-term economic vitality. We are fortunate to work with many organizations who support our startup communities.

One such example is the annual local and regional pitch events.

This last year we had 39 founders pitch at six local contests supported by 10 organizations which led to 12 founders advancing to the NEW Launch Alliance regional competition:

**AMW Arts, Arianna McCormick-Wilson:** Educates the local community in the value of art, both monetarily and in enriching people’s lives, specializing in education, commissioned two-dimensional art, with a market towards seniors and retirees

**Bodhi Bow Wow LLC, Quentin Wood:** Provides services to pet dog owners with the focus on teaching people to train their dogs, using behavior modification and humane training techniques

**Food FIXR, Grace Hameister:** Launched a “Food as Medicine HealthTech” company, to reclaim the health of people and the planet, believing that Food as Medicine is a right for all, highlighting optimal health can be achieved with a trip to the grocery store, not the pharmacy

**HeyGov, Inc. — ClerkMinutes, Dustin Overbeck:** Created a digital platform designed to modernize municipal operations by addressing the inefficiencies of handling forms, payments and user experience

**Kids in Combat Boots, Deanne Herber:** Recognizes military children for their service to our country with a sustained recognition program, resources and a globally accessible community using a shared network and technology

**Little Sips Play Café, Mikala and Joey DeBone:** Launched a play café that serves as a safe, relaxing, secure, educational play space and café for children ages 0-6

**Molo Asian BBQ, Ping Cheng:** Opened an Asian restaurant that will provide good healthy food and a unique experience to the community, offering customer involvement in the preparation process right at their table

**NEW Compost LLC, Connor Freimuth:** Partnering with plant cultivators, the company utilizes sustainable eco-friendly organic products and methodologies to reduce the need for century-old conventional cultivation practices. It repopulates and sustains a living ecosystem in the soil.



**Preempt Physical Therapy, LLC, Sara Ziegele:** Provides workplace risk analysis, employee educational seminars and corporate wellness support to help workers recover from costly preventive overuse injuries

**Protean Footwear, Michaela Heling:** Combines the advantages of three different pairs of baseball and softball shoes — metal, molded and turf — into one pair, using patent-pending technology, which reduces weight to athletic bags, saves space and lowers costs



**SmartWell, LLC, Christian Timm:** Developed an AI-powered device that transforms a groundwater pump into a smart pump capable of tracking water usage, identifying water leaks, forecasting pump failures and increasing the life of a well through proper water-level management

**Vente Tours, Emily Hubbard:** Created a digital platform to redefine travel by bridging the information that a traveler needs with access to products and services a small business can provide

Three pitch winners, NEW Compost LLC, Preempt Physical Therapy LLC, and Kids in Combat Boots will give updates at our New North Summit on June 6. Join us to learn more about the start-up community in Northeast Wisconsin.



# Green Bay Innovation Group: Fostering collaborative growth in 5P industries



A Green Bay-based business consortium has opened the door to mutually beneficial collaboration between diverse companies. The Green Bay Innovation Group (GBIG) is a business-to-business leader in the packaging, paper, plastics, printing, pulp (5P Industries) and converting industries in Wisconsin. GBIG supports the Great Lakes region by empowering innovation and technology.

GBIG, which started in 2017 with one sponsor, has grown to 175 sponsors from across the U.S. and the world. GBIG builds authentic relationships while promoting business opportunities, education and networking.

The key to GBIG's success is the ability to highlight the innovations of world-class manufacturing in the region. In the past, these industries were unrecognized for their innovation and technologies, yet they exported their manufacturing products across the globe. Northeast and Southeast Wisconsin form the Converting Corridor of the U.S., providing tremendous growth opportunities for the region.

Marty Ochs, GBIG executive director, has 50 years of experience in the 5P Industries. He recognized the importance of developing a business-to-business professional organization to serve Wisconsin's diverse 5P and converting companies. GBIG hosts educational events, tours, seminars, a golf outing and an annual expo. Recent GBIG events delved into the themes of PFAS in food packaging and converting, coating, and sustainability.

GBIG publishes a free, bi-weekly e-newsletter called the GBIG News. The GBIG News shares the latest innovations, announcements and events in the industry. GBIG also empowers

women in the profession by supporting an offshoot of the organization – Wi5P (Women in the 5P Industries).

In addition to promoting collaboration and innovation in the 5P Industry, GBIG contributes to the broader community. The Green Bay Innovation Group Foundation donates to nonprofits, community outreach programs, education and the business community. **1**

**GBIG offers free membership, supported by sponsors. To join GBIG, learn more about the organization, or subscribe to the GBIG News, visit [www.greenbayinnovationgroup.com](http://www.greenbayinnovationgroup.com)**



**Company:** Green Bay Innovation Group  
**Innovation:** Promoting 5P industries opportunities, education and networking  
[greenbayinnovationgroup.com](http://greenbayinnovationgroup.com)

# Double your trade show exhibit investment

Skyline Exhibit Resource is well known for providing stellar trade show exhibits. But when COVID-19 all but shut down the industry, resourceful companies turned to



in-house training and events for their clients and prospects. To spruce up corporate offices, executives looked no further than using portions of their trade show exhibit as focal points for their educational events. Kiosks, exhibit walls and graphics once used only for trade shows were showcased throughout lobbies and warehouses to help tell the company story.

Executive teams realized that advertising and promotions begin with a well-designed corporate office. It's important that clients and team members can understand the who, what, where and why of the company upon entering the building. Rather than simply having random pictures on walls, management realized that product photos, history timelines and images showcasing the company culture could tell a great story and help not only increase sales, but also company morale.

COVID seems like a distant memory, but landscaping corporate interiors –



aka “brandscaping” – is here to stay. Creating something beautiful that can be used both at the office and on the road is a savvy new way to get more mileage out of your trade show exhibit investment. **1**

**exhibitRESOURCE**

an authorized **Skyline** dealer

**Company:** Skyline Exhibit Resource  
**Innovation:** Brandscaping  
[exhibit-resource.com](http://exhibit-resource.com)

# Revolutionizing concrete: The innovation journey of Milis Flatwork



Innovation is the cornerstone of progress and, in the realm of construction, few materials have seen as much innovation as concrete. Among the pioneers driving this transformation is Milis Flatwork, a trailblazer in the industry that is dedicated to providing a better product – from traditional foundations to cutting-edge applications such as concrete parking lot overlays to tilt-up construction. Milis Flatwork has redefined what concrete can achieve through continuous research, development and a commitment to pushing the boundaries of possibility, making it Wisconsin's leading concrete contractor.

At the heart of Milis Flatwork innovation lies a dedication to sustainability by its CEO and founder Dylan Milis. “Milis is an industry leader in the concrete construction industry,” he says. “We are actively trying to improve upon our processes and the industry. We like to test the boundaries.”

With testing the boundaries, Milis Flatwork is able to provide its clients with a better product, faster completion and within budget due to its dedication to innovation.

Milis Flatwork has embraced a streamlined process and enhanced product quality by staying ahead of industry-related issues. The volume of concrete that it pours helps to keep the



company in the forefront of progress. Innovation extends beyond materials and production methods; it also encompasses design. Milis Flatwork has an in-house design team ready and waiting to help with customers' needs.

An area where Milis Flatwork is an industry leader is concrete parking lot paving. Milis firmly believes concrete is the best overall building material with the highest level of sustainability and durability for parking lots. Milis brings cost effective concrete options to customers that will outlast the asphalt competitor. With technologically advanced laser screeds equipped with trimble 3D Profiler systems, Milis can bring concrete parking lots to all customers at a competitive price.

Milis Flatwork is committed to fostering a culture of innovation within the industry. Its tilt-up division has set the bar by revolutionizing the way buildings are constructed. With insulated sandwich panel design, Milis Flatwork is able to provide a building structure with a complete thermal envelope. This produces a thermal-efficient building that is untouched by any other building system. These revolutions collectively enhance the speed, quality and sustainability of tilt-up concrete projects, making it an increasingly attractive building option to clients.

Milis Flatwork stands at the forefront of innovation in the construction industry. Through a relentless pursuit of collaboration, the company is redefining the possibilities of concrete. Milis Flatwork's commitment to innovation is paving the way. **1**



**Company:** Milis Flatwork  
**Innovation:** Cost effective concrete options  
[milisflatwork.com](http://milisflatwork.com)

# They're nailing it! Fox Valley Wood Products: a legacy of innovation



Pallets, crating and industrial lumber have been critical to the manufacturing sector for over a century, and Fox Valley Wood Products' longevity is attributed to its commitment to innovation in these important areas. At FVWP, innovation isn't just a buzzword — it's a fundamental part of the company ethos. FVWP has set itself apart through an unwavering focus on hiring great people, investing in new technology and continually improving processes. Here's how they do it:

**Grit:** Founded in 1963 without any machines, forklifts or pneumatic nailers, FVWP's founders built the business with a pouch full of nails, strong hands, and fingers the size of bratwursts. FVWP maintained this generational grit by requiring all new leaders to learn from the ground up.

David Elliot, a long-time supplier to FVWP, shares his unique perspective of the organization: "I have personally had the pleasure of supplying Fox Valley Wood Products for more than 30 years. I started with Don Van Zeeland and his brother, Dale. Now the torch has passed down to their two sons, Jeff and Travis. Throughout this time, as a plywood salesman, I have had the pleasure of traveling throughout the eastern half of the

U.S. I've been in a few hundred pallet facilities throughout. I can say assuredly that the focus from all of the Van Zeelands and their employees has been a customer first approach. They train and retain their employees better than any pallet and crate manufacturer I have ever known. They don't have slogans and

*"We receive most custom skids within a day or less of ordering, at a very reasonable price. Without a doubt, our relationship with Fox Valley Wood Products has and will continue to help our business react, deliver and grow."*

—Pat Keil, Senior Automation Engineer, Tech 4, LLC

other motivation techniques. They are focused on doing things right, the first and every time. As a supplier, we have come to know what they expect. To know them and how the company started, how the company operates, and the expectations they have, it makes you want to make sure that we don't disappoint them from our end. Their customers are our customers."

**Speed:** Customers will immediately experience something different when working with FVWP. Customer calls don't go to voicemail. Emails are responded to within minutes, and orders are fulfilled within 24 hours or less. FVWP commonly receives same-day requests for pallets, crates and industrial shipping platforms.

Pat Keil, senior automation engineer at Tech 4, expressed his appreciation for FVWP's rapid response time: "In our industry we require custom skidding to ship large industrial electrical assemblies. Fox Valley Wood Products has helped streamline this task for us tremendously. Their ability to react to quote requests is second to none. We generally receive quotes within minutes of sending over detailed drawings. Their deliveries are equally as impressive. We receive most custom skids within a day or less of ordering, at a very reasonable price. Without a doubt, our relationship with Fox Valley Wood Products has and will continue to help our business react, deliver, and grow."

**Accountability:** FVWP's promise is to provide an excellent experience from inception to completion. In the event a mistake occurs, the company is eager to make it right.

Josh Roling, VP of manufacturing at Lindquist Machine, agrees: "The team at Fox Valley Wood Products has done an exceptional job of taking the time to understand our needs and



Fox Valley Wood Products' fleet of vehicles is intentionally diverse in size and type. This allows them to promptly service large and small customers alike, all within a 24 hour window.

leveraging their experience to drive value. Better yet, when issues arise — and they do in every organization — the team provides a same-day response that includes a solution (not excuses) to which they are committed — every time. Well done, FVWP!"

**Pricing:** FVWP bases their pricing on industry indexes and offers customers market visibility. When the market drops, they proactively adjust prices. FVWP's commitment is to work with customers to find solutions that bring cost savings to their bottom line. Tim Daanen — President/Owner of B&D Warehouse turned to FVWP during the midst of pandemic supply chain shortages. "I have been working with Jeff and the Fox Valley Wood Products team since 2018. I am forever grateful to them during the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 when they continued to provide us high quality pallets at a reasonable cost in spite of the rapidly changing market conditions, especially when other pallet providers took advantage of the situation. Since then, when we or our customers look for savings, Jeff and the team have provided creative solutions in terms of different pallet sizes and configurations to best serve our needs."

**Investment:** FVWP's growth is generated organically through investing in cutting-edge technology and facilities. Growth is leveraged by taking the long view via investing in technology to become more productive. As capacity increases, FVWP can serve more customers. Continually investing in new equipment from manufacturers such as Go Fast Manufacturing and Viking Engineering are prime examples.

Dan Berken, president of Go Fast Mfg., said: "It's great working with Fox Valley Wood Products. They're always looking to improve processes, open to new ideas and tech, and willing to invest in making operations smoother for employees. Their focus on innovation streamlines operations and makes collaborating with them a rewarding experience."

**People:** Having the right people is the catalyst to innovation. The pallet industry is commonly pegged as an industry with low skill, entry-level people, and FVWP takes exception to this.

"Our company places extra emphasis on hiring high character, motivated people from diverse demographics and skill sets," says Jeff Van Zeeland, president of Fox Valley Wood Products. "We invest in the growth and development of our team to foster a culture of innovation and continuous improvement."

A recent example is FVWP's decision to incorporate an EOS (Entrepreneurial Operating System) into its business. "Our launch began by defining our core values and incorporating them into all personnel-related decisions," says Van Zeeland, adding that the company's core values are Integrity, Positivity, Teamwork, Pacesetter, Accountability and Extraordinary Service. "These values are not based on who we want to be; rather, they are who we are."

**Process:** Fox Valley Wood Products is continuously evaluating and enhancing processes to increase efficiency, reduce waste and enhance overall quality. By implementing best practices and lean methodologies, the company is able to deliver quality

products that exceed customer expectations while operating in a cost-effective and sustainable manner.

Fox Valley Wood Products is a strategic partner with Menominee Tribal Enterprises. Jason Swartz currently serves as the lumber sales manager for MTE. "In my career as a lumber salesman I get the privilege of touring many different types of wood manufacturing companies throughout the United States," Swartz says. "Simply stated, I would not want to compete in their manufacturing space. Clean, organized, streamlined, and efficient are the words I use when describing their operation to others. Not one area in their operation has been overlooked, and they manage this while offering same-day manufacturing and delivery in many cases. We at Menominee Tribal Enterprises look forward to continuing our relationship with Fox Valley for many years to come."

Innovation is not just a goal at Fox Valley Wood Products; it's a way of life. These testimonials illustrate how FVWP is different. Pallets and crating solutions are more valuable to manufacturing than many think. Consider joining FVWP on its journey of innovation and experience the difference for yourself. **I**

· People First  
 · Product Quality  
 · Professionalism  
 · Pallets · Lumber · Custom Crates

www.FoxValleyWoodProducts.com KAUKAUNA, WI • 920.766.4069



Fox Valley Wood Products' first semi tractor, 1968.



**Company:** Fox Valley Wood Products  
**Innovation:** Pallets, lumber, custom crates  
 foxvalleywoodproducts.com

# Beyond the metrics: The Karma Group's innovation in storytelling through data-driven insights & measurement



**The arrival of the 2000s ushered in the era of social media, big data, and advanced analytics.** We were no longer data collectors – we were analysts, deciphering the information leading to customer intent. Experts were finding new connections between social media buzz and brand awareness. The numbers weren't just facts, they were telling a story.

**Marketing has long relied on understanding its audience, but the ability to translate that knowledge into action has seen a dramatic shift.** Traditionally, marketers gleaned insights after a campaign ran – often slow and offering a limited snapshot. Today's data surge empowers real-time, data-driven marketing for laser-focused personalization and optimal impact.

**For decades, the language of advertising has been dominated by numbers.** Forty years ago, success was measured in a simple formula: reach, frequency, and GRPs. The metrics painted a picture of how many people saw our clients' messages. But it was a flat picture, lacking the depth and understanding of the real behavior behind the decisions people made.

**Fast forward to the late 90s, the era of the dot-com boom.** Following the data expansion, reporting now included clicks and impressions. The industry was inundated with numbers, drowning in a sea of information without a clear direction. Yet, amidst the chaos, patterns emerged. Correlations between ad placements and website traffic became the missing puzzle pieces.

**Today, forefront advertising agencies like The Karma Group are data storytellers.** We leverage cutting-edge AI tools to translate raw information into actionable insights that empower our clients – pulling together each piece of disparate data into a single, cohesive narrative of the customer's interactions and preferences throughout their journey. This process allows for deep and effective analysis, providing a roadmap for adjustments to the media strategy, creative and budget allocation to ensure the best investment and return for the client.

**This innovative shift has transformed our client relationships.** We help them understand not just how many people saw their ad, but who those people are, what drives them and how to connect with them in a meaningful way. We prioritize transparency in our metrics and reporting, ensuring our clients are fully informed and equipped to make data-driven decisions. Businesses should have this information at their fingertips, with the ability to access it at any time. This approach keeps The Karma Group positioned as a strategic partner for our clients.

**The future awaits, and The Karma Group is ready.** Continued advancements with AI are poised to reveal even richer customer insights. Imagine tools that anticipate customer behavior with precision, allowing us to craft campaigns that adapt in real time. We envision a future where data doesn't just tell stories; it co-writes them, crafting personalized narratives that resonate with every single consumer.



**As we celebrate 40 years of innovation at The Karma Group, we remain committed to staying ahead of the curve.** In the ever-evolving world of advertising, the most powerful tool isn't just data; it's the insights that data reveals. We'll keep transforming data into actionable stories that drive success for our clients. We don't just deliver results; we deliver understanding. Because in the end, true partnership thrives on transparency and the power of insightful storytelling. 📌

**theKarmagroup**

**Company:** The Karma Group  
**Innovation:** Data storytelling  
thekarmagroup.com

# Say goodbye to dead zones: Shea Electric and Wilson Pro's pioneering 5G solution



Have you experienced the frustration of a dropped call or missed text the moment you step into a building? It's a common problem.

Even with 5G's promise of lightning-fast connectivity, the moment you walk indoors, that assurance often fades. But why settle for less when your building can be the benchmark for seamless communication?

At Shea Electric & Communications, we believe in the power of communication and collaboration. Our goal is to help our customers realize what is possible. That's why we've teamed up with Wilson Pro to offer advanced 5G boosting technology compatible with any carrier. With Wilson Pro technology, you can finally find the perfect communication solutions for your building.

Wilson Electronics, the brains behind Wilson Pro, is a trailblazer in mobile, in-building and IoT communication technologies. Wilson Pro's expertise is unmatched, with over 2.1 million products enhancing cell signal coverage and a commitment to setting industry standards alongside the FCC and major carriers. Their Distributed Antenna System (DAS) is a significant change, capturing external cell signals and amplifying them up to 32 times to ensure every corner of your building has robust 5G coverage.

But why does your building struggle with cell reception in the first place? While great for energy efficiency,



modern construction materials are often the culprits. UV-rated windows, brick, concrete, metal and stone are excellent for insulation but notorious for blocking cell signals. Add to that the challenge of lower levels or basements, and it's clear why many buildings have dead zones. But it doesn't need to be that way.

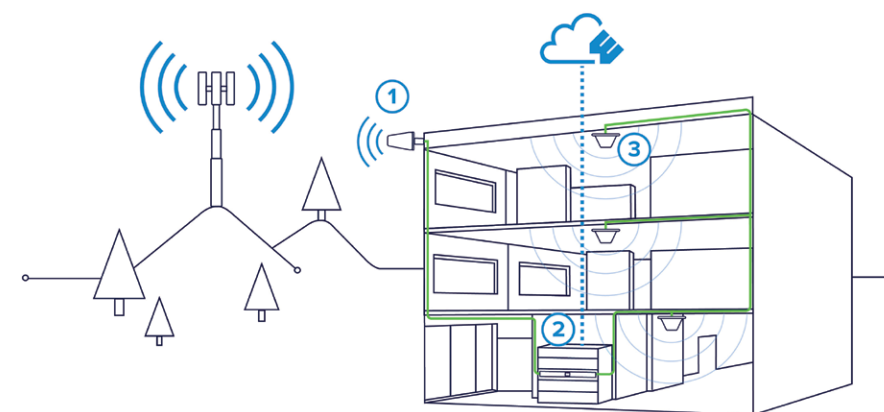
Wilson Pro's 5G cellular signal repeater solution is designed to tackle these challenges head-on, ensuring:

- Universal compatibility with all cell service providers
- Enhanced cell and data speeds throughout your building
- A significant reduction in dropped calls and improved call quality
- Constant connectivity for your employees, customers, and visitors

For business owners, IT professionals and facility directors, shifting to a 5G-enhanced DAS with Wilson Pro technology is not just an investment in infrastructure, it is an investment in the future of your business's connectivity and productivity. With Shea Electric & Communications by your side, navigating this upgrade is straightforward and hassle-free.

In today's digital age, seamless indoor connectivity is not just a luxury – it is a necessity. Let Shea Electric & Communications and Wilson Pro elevate your building's 5G experience. Because in the world of business, staying connected means staying ahead.

Learn how we can help here: [www.sheaelectricllc.com](http://www.sheaelectricllc.com). 📌



**Company:** Shea Electric & Communications, LLC

**Innovation:** 5G boosting technology

[sheaelectricllc.com](http://sheaelectricllc.com)

# Icon Marketing leads innovation in the promotional marketing industry



The promotional marketing industry has always been rooted in fun and creativity, but innovation and invention have become critical components of success for promotional marketing companies today. Icon Marketing, a top-tier promotional products distributor located in Northeast Wisconsin for more than 20 years, has evolved with the changing business landscape to continue to provide value and innovative services to its clients across the United States that align with the demands of business today.

their branded merchandise through targeted e-commerce solutions. Corporate retail storefronts, designed exclusively for large corporate clients, allow for the sale of branded goods internally to employees or externally to the general public. The Icon team works closely with each client on everything from product selection to marketing strategy to store design. Corporate retail storefronts offer many benefits including streamlined ordering, brand compliance, better inventory management and less waste – even while expanding the product offering. Gift redemption storefronts offer clients a superior way to gift

to reward employees for a job well done or to commemorate employee anniversaries or life milestones. Pop-up shops are the perfect solution for clients who want to offer their employees a high-impact storefront filled with a limited selection of branded merchandise at a nominal cost. Pop-up shops are perfect for those clients who are not ready for a full company store, but want to offer the option to purchase branded merchandise on a short-term basis.

## E-commerce technology

With the expansion of e-commerce solutions, Icon Marketing has also worked collaboratively with our solution provider to continue to innovate and identify technology solutions to help service our clients at the highest level. Internally, we use a variety of APIs to connect to third-party systems that allow us to better manage our storefronts and the fulfillment of goods to our clients. We have also deployed SSO integrations for several clients which allows employees to access the storefront securely and without the need for additional login credentials. With a focus on continuous improvement process for our team and our clients, Icon Marketing ensures that our e-commerce solutions continue to evolve and stay ahead of the competition.

## Warehouse technology & fulfillment

Icon Marketing offers a full range of warehousing and fulfillment services to include packing/kitting and bulk shipping, to ongoing subscription fulfillment and e-commerce management. This breadth of services is available in part due to our state-of-the-art warehouse facility and dedicated warehouse team. We carefully manage inventory and fulfill orders using the latest technology



and we are extremely proud that our order accuracy and fulfillment times often exceed industry standards. Every project, big or small, receives the same careful attention and is double checked for accuracy.

## Retail brands

If there is one thing that is constant within the promotional products industry, it is change – especially product changes! There has been a recent movement toward putting an emphasis on quality over price and focusing on sustainability and socially

conscious items. Product innovation within the promotional marketing industry looks different today than it did just a few short years ago.

*“If there is one thing that is constant within the promotional products industry, it is change — especially product changes!”*

Brands that traditionally were only sold at retail have been entering the promotional products industry in large numbers over the past few years such as Vineyard Vines, Peter Millar and HydroFlask. Clients are recognizing that they can create very positive brand associations by paying attention to the items on which they promote their brand.

## Sustainability & corporate responsibility

Last year, sales of sustainable products surged 20% from 2022 figures and the 2024 projection for sustainable product sales growth is just as robust. Clients today continue to demand products that have a minimal effect on the environment. Similarly, 58% of clients indicate that they are more likely to purchase from (or support) brands that align with their values. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) primarily centers around environmental,

ethical/human rights, philanthropic and economic responsibility and an increasing number of promotional product companies are expanding their product offering to include items that resonate with this demand.

## Your brand, your way

Clients today are looking for ways to create a distinctive brand presence that is unique, impactful and memorable. Icon Marketing and the promotional marketing industry have responded with an increased offering of completely custom products. From socks to sweatshirts to hats to hard goods, the number of items that can be completely customized to align with a client's branding and colors is exploding. While fully custom products have a greater lead time, costs are often very competitive and the design flexibility available is unparalleled. We have guided numerous clients through the design process and are proud to be a part of bringing products to market that truly reflect our client's branding on a whole new level.

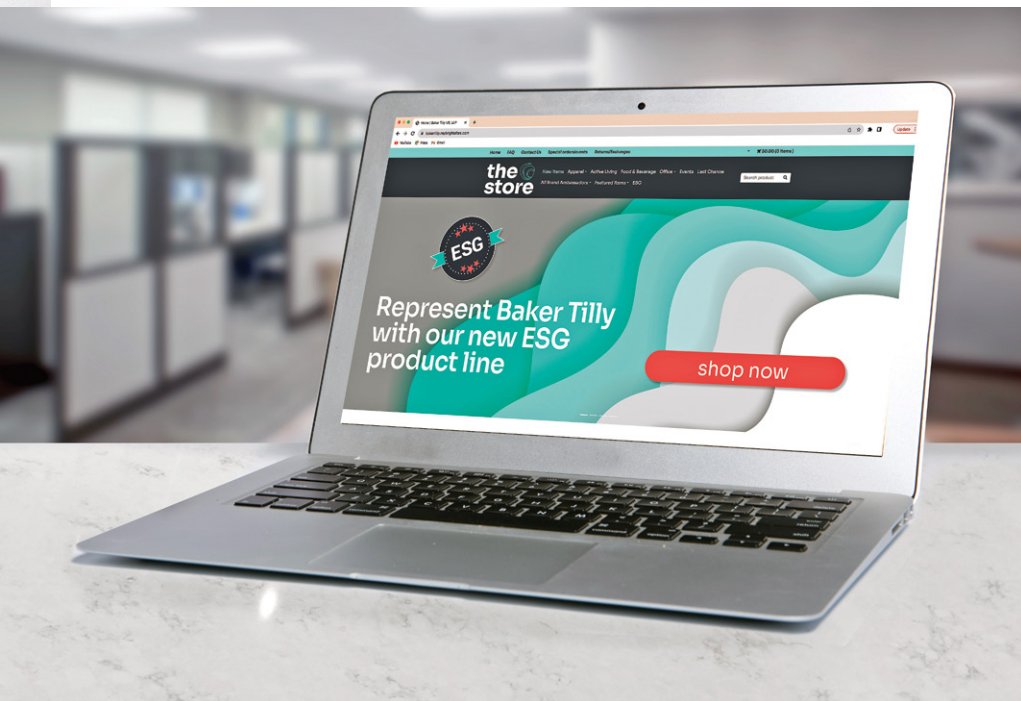
The promotional products industry has evolved greatly over the past few years as clients continue to demand unique, brand focused solutions to drive business forward. Icon Marketing leads the way with innovative responses to these changing market needs and will continue to do so to ensure that we are delivering a best-in-class experience to our clients. **I**



**Company:** Icon Marketing

**Innovation:** Managing brand merchandise utilizing e-commerce and warehousing technologies

iconmarketinginc.com



## E-commerce solutions

Icon Marketing was among the first promotional distributors to recognize the power of e-commerce solutions within our industry. From corporate storefronts to gift redemption storefronts to pop-up shops, Icon Marketing helps clients better manage

employees, prospects or customers. Gift recipients enter a code to choose their gift instead of having to make a payment. Gift redemption storefronts can offer tiered categories of gifts to truly customize the experience for a large audience. These redemption storefronts offer an elevated way



# Reinventing tradition: Badger State's BRW-SKI American Lager



In 2019, the Wisconsin brewing landscape witnessed a significant transformation with the introduction of BRW-SKI American Lager, a game-changer that swiftly carved out its niche as one of the first pure craft light lagers in the state's

new brewing era. Situated in the heart of Wisconsin, Badger State Brewing Co. set out with a clear mission: to craft a lager that not only paid homage to the state's rich brewing heritage, but also pushed the boundaries of traditional craft beer, staying away from production of "light" beers.

Andrew Fabry, founder of Badger State and creator of BRW-SKI, had long dreamed of creating a beer that would resonate with both connoisseurs and casual drinkers alike. He envisioned

a lager that was both accessible and complex, embodying the spirit of Wisconsin's brewing history while appealing to contemporary tastes. After selling co-founder Sam Yanda on the idea of making a light beer, the team finally hit on a recipe that captured their vision.

BRW-SKI American Lager was crafted using locally sourced ingredients, including water sourced from Lake Michigan which lended an excellent profile suitable to lager production.

The launch of BRW-SKI was met with anticipation and excitement. From the outset, the lager was a hit, characterized by its crisp, refreshing taste with subtle hints of sweetness and a smooth finish that appealed to a wide array of palates. Its branding, which features the Wisconsin State license plate, has helped cement its identity as a quintessentially Wisconsin brew.

BRW-SKI's success goes beyond flavor and marketing. It sparked a renewed interest in craft lagers within the state, inspiring other breweries to explore and innovate within this often-overlooked

category. The beer has become a staple at local drinking establishments, celebrated for bringing a beloved tradition back into the spotlight.

As BRW-SKI American Lager has grown in popularity, it has not only highlighted the possibilities within the craft lager niche, but also set the standard for future brews. In doing so, it has played a pivotal role in ushering in a new era for Wisconsin's brewing industry – one that respected its roots while eagerly embracing the future. **I**



**Company:** Badger State Brewing  
**Innovation:** BRW-SKI American Lager  
[badgerstatebrewing.com](http://badgerstatebrewing.com)

# Home-state TDS grows fiber internet network



Fast, reliable internet connections are more important than ever. That's exactly what TDS Telecommunications LLC (TDS) is focused on as it expands its all-fiber, high-speed network in Northeast Wisconsin and throughout the state.

TDS is a Wisconsin-based company that has operated in the state for more than 50 years. During that time, TDS has become a national leader in fiber-optic construction, providing more than 1.2 million customer connections to high-speed internet, phone and TV services across the country.

Now, TDS is deepening its roots in Wisconsin with fiber internet

construction projects underway in Appleton, Green Bay, Manitowoc and several other communities.

"Wisconsin is a top priority for TDS. In the Badger State alone, TDS is investing nearly a billion of its own dollars to build state-of-the-art fiber optic networks," said Drew Petersen, TDS senior vice president of corporate affairs. "We're thrilled to grow our presence in our home state and look forward to serving our communities for years to come."

TDS builds the infrastructure of the future – enabling economic development, business growth and better connections for school, work and entertainment. The company has found that communities can be transformed with better, faster internet access.

Fiber internet is known as the "gold standard" of residential internet connections because it features some of the fastest internet speeds in the world. With speeds up to 8 Gigabit available, a file of any size can be uploaded or downloaded nearly instantly.

For businesses, TDS offers special high-speed dedicated connections to ensure they have the bandwidth to be successful. TDS also offers a sophisticated digital TV product, TDS TV+, as well as a variety of phone options.

"As a longtime Wisconsin company, we are so excited to serve even more communities in our home state," Petersen said. "We're proud our fiber networks will help boost a critical part of infrastructure and improve residents' quality of life."

For more information on TDS products and services, visit [TDSFiber.com](http://TDSFiber.com). **I**



INTERNET | PHONE | TV

**Company:** TDS Telecom  
**Innovation:** Fiber-optic construction  
[TDSFiber.com](http://TDSFiber.com)

# Cornerstone's CAPex program supports business advisors



An M&A film screening in Dallas, Texas, hosted by a CAPex partner.

Cornerstone Business Services, a leading lower middle market M&A firm, recently launched CAPex, the Cornerstone Advisory Partners Exit Program. The program aims to help business owners plan their exit strategy earlier and more effectively by collaborating with their trusted advisors such as financial planners, CPAs, attorneys and business coaches.

## Missed opportunities

The CAPex program addresses a common challenge faced by professional advisors: losing opportunities because they weren't part of the conversation about how a client would exit their business.

"We hear it time and time again," says Scott Bushkie, founder and CEO of Cornerstone Business Services. "A financial advisor helps a business owner manage their assets, but when the business sells, the advisor finds out secondhand. By that point, the business owner has already been approached by other firms and this long-standing relationship falls apart."

The CAPex program aims to change this narrative by empowering trusted advisors to start the exit planning conversation early and create a team of specialists to support their clients. The program is designed to help professional advisors improve client outcomes – while growing their own business and strengthening Cornerstone's referral base.

## Value all around

"There's a direct correlation between proactive planning with a team of

specialists and success in the M&A marketplace," says Bushkie. "These business owners are far more likely to sell their business and close at a higher multiple than their industry peers."

According to Bushkie, the goal with CAPex is to help professionalize lower middle market M&A and bring together forward-thinking advisors "who truly want to take care of their clients."



Scott Bushkie shared books with team members of Avantax Planning Partners at their recent annual conference. Pictured is Emily Millsap, CFP.

## Advisor benefits

By way of example, picture the financial advisor whose average client has an asset value of half a million. In order for the advisor to reach their next \$100 million AUM, they'd have to find and onboard 200 people.

"We want to help them get their next \$100 million with four clients or 10," says Bushkie. "It not only makes their company more valuable, but it allows them to provide better service."

CPAs can also gain by defending their position in tax structuring, audits and value enhancement consulting – services Cornerstone may recommend before a business owner takes their company to market.

## CAPex resources

The CAPex program leverages Bushkie's book, "Finish Strong: Sell Your Business On Your Terms," and its companion workbook to initiate the exit planning conversation. Trusted advisors can use these resources to have intimate, one-on-one conversations with their business owner clients or conduct workshops to guide their clients through small, actionable steps towards a successful business exit.

As part of the program, advisors also receive articles, M&A quarterly updates, video tutorials and discounted business valuations for their clients. They may also opt to host a private client screening of "M&A," the first motion picture-rated documentary on the industry, in which Bushkie had a significant role. (See the trailer at [MAdecade.com](http://MAdecade.com).)

The CAPex program is currently accepting applications for founding members at no cost. Interested advisors can visit [CAPexProgram.com](http://CAPexProgram.com) to learn more and apply. The program launched in Q1 2024.

With millions of boomer-owned businesses expected to change hands in the coming decade, the CAPex program will play a crucial role in ensuring business owners have the support and resources they need to maximize the return on the sale of their single greatest asset. **I**



CORNERSTONE  
BUSINESS SERVICES

**Company:** Cornerstone Business Services

**Innovation:** Cornerstone Advisory Partners Exit Program (CAPex)

[cornerstone-business.com](http://cornerstone-business.com)

## Thriving together: revolutionizing your company's growth through cutting-edge employee wellness



In today's fast-paced work environments, employee wellness often takes a back seat to pressing deadlines and bottom-line pressures. However, studies consistently show that prioritizing employee well-being is not just a nice-to-have but a strategic imperative that drives success

and longevity for companies of all sizes.

Investing in innovative employee wellness programs goes beyond boosting morale and engagement; it's a pathway to unlocking higher productivity and creativity. By providing a supportive environment that values their health, companies can cultivate a workforce that is not only engaged but also highly motivated to perform at their best.

Wellness initiatives such as personalized fitness plans, mindfulness programs, and holistic stress management techniques are no longer optional but essential components of a thriving workplace. These programs not only reduce healthcare costs but also enhance mental health, leading to a more resilient and vibrant workforce.

In today's job market, offering forward-thinking wellness programs is a powerful tool for attracting and retaining top talent. Employees are increasingly seeking employers who prioritize their well-being, and companies that do so gain a significant edge in recruitment and retention efforts.

The YMCA is at the forefront of this wellness revolution, offering innovative corporate membership programs that can be tailored to meet the unique needs of your company. These programs provide employees with access to state-of-the-art facilities and cutting-edge wellness programs, and online class

options, promoting physical activity and healthy living.

By partnering with the YMCA, companies can create a culture of well-being that not only enhances employee satisfaction and retention but also drives business success. To learn more about how the YMCA can elevate your company's employee wellness initiatives, contact us at [marketing@ymcafoxcities.org](mailto:marketing@ymcafoxcities.org) or visit your local YMCA branch. Together, let's thrive! 📌



**Company:** YMCA

**Innovation:** Innovative employee wellness programs

## Think beyond. Think adaptation. Think innovation.



As technology and customer needs evolve, AZCO is well positioned to adapt and capitalize on thinking beyond

traditional construction methods by using today's technology and innovations to significantly improve solar field installation and help accelerate Wisconsin's transition to cleaner, renewable energy.

For example, in July 2021 AZCO began working with Alliant Energy's Wisconsin Clean Energy Blueprint Solar construction program. Through planning ahead and managing risks, 2023 was a year filled with completing nine solar projects and delivering zero-fuel-cost energy to the grid.

Not all projects were a piece of cake and easy to install. Challenges included complex geotechnical studies, and test pile installation that indicated foundations often filled

with rocks interrupting underground scope, pile driving, trenching and subsequent cable installation.

Confronted with the wettest weather conditions on record at one of the sites, planning and managing risks was paramount to commissioning in phases and completing the projects on time — even ahead of schedule.

Thinking beyond traditional construction, our team translated the solar site panel designs to the field using GPS technology for accurate positioning of the construction equipment. The software and hardware needed were installed on pile drivers, skid steers and survey equipment, information was loaded into each for precise helical pile and cable installation coordinates.

Overcoming the cobble and rock obstructions, the crew then transitioned to installing bi-facial panels, meaning they collect energy directly from the sun and light that

reflects from the ground. To adapt to the schedule, the team used custom-built trailers to handle cable so multiple circuits could be pulled at once, using mechanical methods to load, unload and pull. This limited exposure to muscle strains and injury while capitalizing on productivity.

Planning ahead, adapting to schedule and conditions, and innovatively using technology keeps our projects moving forward and builds stronger communities. 📌



A BURNS & MCDONNELL COMPANY

**Company:** AZCO INC.

**Innovation:** Using technology in industrial construction

[azco-inc.com](http://azco-inc.com)

## BAYCOM: Unifying voice, data, video and AI analytics in one security-driven platform

BAYCOM's Lifeline Technology Center (LTC) and Systems Acceptance Lab were designed for customers to see, interact and experience state-of-the-art technologies before investing in them. Centrally located in the Madison area, the BAYCOM team works side-by-side with customers to demonstrate how today's technologies combine to make operations safer and more efficient — today, tomorrow and into the future.

### Seeing is believing

You may already appreciate the value of having reliable two-way radio communications or the insights you can glean from surveillance system video. Solutions like these are powerful tools in their own right, but when combined they deliver unrivaled opportunities to detect, analyze, communicate and respond to situations as they arise. Our LTC is designed to showcase the value of integrated voice, video and data ecosystems. During your visit, tell us about your most challenging safety and security concerns. We'll tailor a live-action scenario to demonstrate how these technologies work together to give you powerful, proactive capabilities when every moment matters.

### Deploy with confidence

If you've ever deployed an enterprise-wide system, you know it's critical to work out the bugs before the system is rolled out.



Within our new Systems Acceptance Lab, you are encouraged to test drive systems configured to meet your needs, allowing you to give feedback and make changes long before the technologies are deployed in the field. In creating this central location for all BAYCOM system configurations, we also ensure a consistent staging and testing process and a comfortable environment for customers like you to observe your system's pre-deployment performance.

### Gain peace of mind

Once your system is deployed, we continue to support you through our service agreement program. SystemGuard is customized to meet your needs and can include repair, preventive maintenance, tuning and

testing of equipment for optimal performance or providing software and firmware updates. You also get priority status, minimizing the potential for operational disruption if an issue arises.

### It will work.

"We are proud to showcase our Lifeline Technology Center, where we can demonstrate the technology ecosystem that keeps our public safety agencies, schools and businesses connected and secure," said BAYCOM President Katie Busch. "We love having customers in this space where we can understand their safety and security needs, and create and show the solutions that will keep their workplace safe. This space is a natural extension of our brand promise: It will work. We've done the research, we have the experience and above all, we're in this together." 📌

[lifelinetechcenter@baycominc.com](mailto:lifelinetechcenter@baycominc.com)  
800.726.5426



A Lifeline in the Moments that Matter

**Company:** BAYCOM Inc.

**Innovation:** Lifeline Technology Center

[BAYCOMINC.com](http://BAYCOMINC.com)



## Casting a sustainable future: Waupaca Foundry offers customers Scope 3 emissions reduction



Foundries are the ultimate recyclers. For generations, Waupaca Foundry has created new products out of recycled steel scrap iron and repurposes many raw materials used in creating new iron castings. In an era where automakers are setting aggressive targets to reduce the automotive industry's carbon footprint, to be successful requires auto suppliers to get on the decarbonization bandwagon.

Waupaca Foundry emerges as an industry leader by providing not only automakers but all manufacturers with what can best be described as a groundbreaking step to reduce global emissions with Waupaca Green Castings™.

Unbeknownst to many, the iron casting industry plays a pivotal role in virtually every sector of the economy, from construction and agriculture to transportation and

industry. Waupaca Foundry is not just a key player in sustainability, it is a leader. Over the years, it has pioneered innovative solutions in many areas, including manufacturing process excellence, machine learning, technology and automation – all of which are still emerging in modern manufacturing. The Foundry's global reputation as a trusted supplier stems from its unwavering commitment to not only meeting but exceeding its customers' needs sustainably.

Their latest innovation, Waupaca Green Castings™, introduces a solution to the need for tackling Scope 3 greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Scope 3 emissions correspond to all indirect emissions occurring in a company's value chain. They are harder to control and manage and typically represent a large percentage of a company's total greenhouse gas emissions footprint. By deploying carbon-neutral processes in foundry production, Waupaca Foundry iron castings go green and are a powerful tool for manufacturers to reduce their carbon footprint.

What sets Waupaca Foundry apart is not just its capacity to melt 2 million tons of iron annually, nor its use of technology and automation. Its true success lies within a mission powered by its people that goes beyond supplying iron castings; at its core, the company aims to do so

in a way that benefits the planet. This has taken shape by embracing lean manufacturing and continuous improvement principles across all operations.

Waupaca Foundry has led the industry in prioritizing our natural resources, paving the way for the industry to become a Practical Green Foundry for over two decades. By 2030, Waupaca Foundry aims to reduce its Scope 1 and 2 carbon emissions by 25%. It now offers supply chain organizations at global manufacturers with carbon-neutral gray and ductile iron castings to meet aggressive Scope 3 GHG emissions reduction targets.

Encouraging a shift towards more sustainable practices is a challenge that businesses must confront, but it comes with the potential to develop a competitive edge in the market. As companies seek to reduce Scope 1 & 2, as well as Scope 3 GHG emissions and set aggressive reduction targets, the demand for carbon-neutral products and parts from suppliers surges. Waupaca Green Castings™ fills this gap, offering manufacturers a means to meet, and even surpass, their sustainability goals with green iron castings.

Forecasts predict a future world where sustainability is not a choice but a must for any competitive business. Waupaca Foundry is leading the charge. Green iron castings signify a monumental stride toward a more sustainable world. This visionary approach reinforces Waupaca's position as an industry leader. 📌



**Company:** Waupaca Foundry

**Innovation:** Waupaca Green Castings™

[waupacafoundry.com](http://waupacafoundry.com)

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