

The Wenger Work Family Story

Building Our Future while Honoring Our Roots



Some families have family bands – the Wengers were a family roofing crew!

Written by Jake Wenger, President and son of Ma & Pa Wenger, founders.

INTRODUCTION

I am very thankful for the hard work and risk taken by my parents and grandparents to build the strong foundation Wenger has grown from. Their sacrifice, long hours and working for survival are responsible for the opportunities everyone who works here at Wenger has today. We are proud of our family roots, we are proud of who we are and what we stand for. We do not take lightly the honor the generations before us deserve. We owe it them, ourselves and our customers to build a legacy – one that will payoff that risk, gritty work ethic and sacrifice, that has woven its' way through 4 generations.

The Wenger's have always treated their employees and their customers like family. This is the legacy we strive to uphold and strengthen today – a positive, solution driven work environment for our employees – providing a great experience for our customers. From first sale to final nail, this level of customer and employee care, honors all of those that have given something to this cause.



Chapter 1: THE BEGINNING

It all began in 1950, when Jake and Martha Wenger moved from Switzerland to start a family farm in Hartford, Wisconsin. They had a couple of kids at the time and not a lot of money, but saw the opportunity the American Dream had to offer. Their courageous and entrepreneurial spirit carried on through the next generation to John and Laurie Wenger (Ma & Pa), the founders of Wenger Construction, Inc.

John began helping his dad roof their neighbor's barns when he was 12 years old, supplementing the family farm income. My dad would get paid in bike parts in those days! We always kid when we get together as a family – of all of the side hustles, you had to pick roofing. Couldn't have done the neighbor's taxes or plumbing? In all seriousness, we are who we are today because of the hard work ethic that roofing has instilled in me and my brothers, and we wouldn't trade it for anything.

Thank you Mom and Dad!

Chapter 2: MA & PA – THE EARLY YEARS

Ma & Pa were great parents. They taught me and my brothers the value of hard work, a reverence to God and actions had consequences. We had very little means – having to work very hard to keep up and get ahead. We heated the house we grew up in with firewood. Every fall we cut down trees in farmer's fence lines, split it, loaded it and piled it up in a basement that we filled to the brim. The good old days of us kids riding in the back of Dad's pickup truck or trying to take one of our brothers out by chucking the wood down the ramp to the basement while they were piling - are very fond memories! Pa worked two jobs, one at a factory 2nd shift and the other roofing 1st shift, while also doing roofing side jobs on the weekends.

I can remember getting government cheese when we were growing up. We picked nightcrawlers and sold them – watering the lawn and spending nights hunched over with a slimy bucket of worms! We walked ditches and dove into local lake dumpsters for aluminum cans and would spend hours crushing them with a sledgehammer in the garage. Our punishment for being naughty – which seemed like a lot – was weeding the massive garden that filled our shelves for the season. My parents started with next to nothing and took advantage of every opportunity and worked their butts off to give me and my brothers a better life. We will never take that for granted.

We all grew up roofing as a family – I can remember us boys & Ma cleaning up piles of shingles that were taller than us, humping bundles of shingles and sheets of plywood up a wood ladder and the hearty lunches Ma would prepare for us. Some families have family bands – the Wengers were a family roofing crew.



Chapter 3: WENGER CONSTRUCTION, INC. STARTS

The Wenger entrepreneurial spirit was tapped into once again, and on **June 1st 1997**, John & Laurie Wenger took a risk, went out on their own and started Wenger Construction, Inc. My brother, Craig, was their first and only employee. Pa and Craig were out doing the work while Ma kept the office in order. Lee Wilke was our second full-time employee and is considered part of our family. Lee has been with Wenger for nearly all 28+ years and has made a massive positive impact on who we are today.

I wanted to see what else was out there after high school, outside of our family's business. I had a couple of factory jobs, working 3rd shift and decided to go back to school. After college, I had a couple of office jobs selling insurance and being a cost accountant in a cubicle – was a little too stuffy for me. I had a calling to come back to the family business and came back and worked in the field for many years. I took advantage of rain days, coming into the office, where Pa taught me the “ins and outs” of the business.

In **2000**, my brother Nick came to work full time at Wenger. My wife, Dionne, also started working for the business in **2006**. Now the entire Wenger family was working here. We have had our ups and our downs over the years. This can be a tough gritty industry that finds new ways to test resolve hourly! Today we all get along and love each other very much. Not sure how many people can say they work with their 2 Brothers, Mom and Dad and Wife for nearly 30 years and we all still get along – it truly is a blessing. Ma & Pa have 9 beautiful grandchildren and an extended work family of around 90.



Laurie (Ma), John (Pa), Craig,
Nick and Jake



Craig, John (Pa), Nick and Jake



In **2007**, we celebrated our 10th anniversary and expanded by investing in a computerized auto-brake and power shear for fabricating metal in our shop. We have since purchased additional fabricating equipment and run a full time architectural sheet metal fabrication shop. We had 20 employees in 2007.



In **2008**, I saw an opportunity to grow what my parents and family had built from a “Mom and Pop” roofing company into more of a “Corporate Commercial Roofing and Sheet Metal Business with a Family Feel”. I wrote a business plan and presented to the local Fond du Lac County Economic Development Corporation, where they believed in us and gave us the seed money we needed to grow.

In **2008**, we also started our flat roofing department and became a Carlisle certified installer. We have won the Carlisle Perfect10n Award the past 11 years in a row. This is given to the top 5% of Carlisle certified installers in North America based on quality perfect 10 inspections, NOT volume.

In **2012**, we started our Service Team. Back in these days we would have to call guys out on our crews in the middle of the day and sheepishly ask them to pull off of jobs to stop at leaks on their way home from work. This was not good for morale or response time. We saw a demand for doing high quality service work from leak repairs to building envelope investigations. Out of this was born the Wenger Service Team. Today, Josh Storck, our Service Manager, who has been here for over 10 years leads this department with an awesome support team: Tammy Haeni as the Service Administrator who has been here for 5 years and Jason Bichler, our Flat Roofing Inspector who has also been here for 5 years. We have 4 – 2 Technician Service Crews that respond in a timely manner to leaks and building envelope issues.

This rounded out our growth and the vision of the business plan I had written to be a one stop shop for commercial exterior cladding services. We were a Commercial Roofing, Commercial Siding, Architectural Sheet Metal and Service company. This gave us the ability to fill all of the needs that our commercial customers had. We were at 35 employees in **2012**.

Chapter 4: SURVIVAL MODE

Timing is always unpredictable when starting or growing a business. In 2008, the same year I wrote the business plan for Wenger to grow, a recession decided to test our resolve. This rattled us, but did not break us. We had our challenges trying to grow into the face of an economy that did not want to cooperate. We also had a similar blow in 2013 – the Wenger legacy was hanging on by a thread. However, the loyalty shown by our workers, vendors, and customers was nothing short of a miracle! We came together, persevered, and now possess the wisdom and experience that comes from surviving such trials.



Chapter 5: THE PIVOT

In the early years we did a lot of shingle and residential siding work. As we have grown, we have pivoted to become a full-service commercial siding, roofing and architectural sheet metal company. A one stop-shop for your building envelope. Part of the recipe of our success is being able to deliver a great customer experience no matter the size of the project. We have been relentlessly working on perfecting that as well as keeping that “Family Feel” through our growth. We strive to give the same level of industry leading customer experience whether you call us for a few hundred dollar leak repair or a few hundred thousand dollar reroofing project or a few million dollar multi-family boutique high rise siding project.

Chapter 6: OUR PEOPLE

Over the past 3 decades we have built a work family with some absolutely amazing people. Nearly every person that works here at Wenger, whether in the field or in the office has “done the job”. Many of our field and office leaders started at the bottom, worked hard, took advantage of opportunities and moved up.

We have a gritty, hard-working, experienced field force including Roofing Professionals, Siding & Architectural Sheet Metal Craftsmen, and Service Technicians. Wenger Worker Academy was launched in 2014 and has provided clear advancement opportunities with performance reviews conducted at 60 days, 6 months and annually. Our vision statement calls for Wenger to have resources in place for good workers to become great workers. Through a merit-based system a worker can work their way up from Laborer – Apprentice – Leadman – Foreman – General Foreman and beyond.

I want to introduce you to 3 of many great Wenger leaders, who have earned important roles here at Wenger after starting at the bottom.



Lee Wilke was here since the beginning and was on our very first crew with my brother Craig. Lee & Craig were the ones on the front lines pushing the boundaries of what we could install. They were our first roofing crew, our first siding crew, our first architectural sheet metal crew. They were also our first foremen and project managers. Lee and Craig blazed the trail for many of the roles here at Wenger. Lee isn't afraid of hard work, is always there to help anyone with anything and is a wealth of knowledge in our industry. Lee has recently been promoted to our Sales Manager, our Get Work in Team Leader. Lee always leads by example with his work ethic and positive attitude. I am proud and honored to have Lee by my side.



Lisa Storck, our COO, has been at Wenger for just under 12 years. Lisa started for us at a project called Racine Villas. Lisa worked in the field as a caulker on this crew. It did not take long to recognize that Lisa was a great people leader and very quickly she had opportunities to lead projects and crews. She is also a great problem solver. Lisa has taken advantage of every opportunity she has gotten and has climbed all the way to 2nd in command. She cares so deeply about our people and our customers. Lisa is my rock – she gives everything she has to keeping a chaotic Get Work Done team on track. She delivers peace of mind to our customers, myself and those on her team and that is something that is priceless.



This year marked **Justin Schienebeck's** 10 year work anniversary at Wenger. Justin's professional journey is a great American story! Justin started as a summer helper on our roofing crew a decade ago. He showed up every day, worked his butt off and had an infectious can-do attitude. Justin earned opportunities to go from seasonal help to Roofing Leadman to Roofing Foreman to Project Manager to our Vice President of Flat Roofing Operations! Justin's journey defines merit. He is a shining example of what Wenger is all about and who we are at our best, like so many others who have made Wenger their career choice.

We have many other great leaders inside the walls and out on the front lines of Wenger. So many that have made an impact. Many that have been part of our work family for 5, 10 and 15 or more years!

Chapter 7: WENGER TODAY

There have been many innovations alongside many challenges in our nearly 3 decade history. Challenges that almost took us out. We leaned into the fabric of our foundation, built by generations before us – our roots. This is what got us through, working as hard and fearless as they did. We persevered - we stand here today battle tested, experienced and hungry.

We can do the simple; however thrive with the complex, highly detailed, boutique projects. We are setup to be a partner, not just another sub.

Our foundation is built on principles that are the American Dream: hard work, sacrifice, vision, grit and perseverance. We are truly a family business where all of our employees feel like they are part of one big family. Today, Wenger focuses on delivering a consistent world-class customer experience from first sale to final nail. The key to this is our people – our work family.

THEN.....



NOW.....



Madison Yards - Madison, WI

Metl-Span's 2023 Building of the Year



River House Apartments - Milwaukee, WI

Chapter 8: WENGER TOMORROW

I am going to get a little real, a little raw here.....

As a business grows the biggest struggle for us has been to keep the same level of family and service and care as when we were smaller. More people, same goals. This is what keeps me up at night. This business runs through me like blood – I can feel when good things happen and it makes me feel great and proud and I can also feel when we slip up and it makes me feel like we have failed whoever was affected by that particular ball being dropped. We don't claim perfection, but strive for it. When a problem arises we are solution driven and stare the problem in the face and own it – we don't run and hide.

It is our goal to make the cheeseburger at the McDonalds in Milwaukee taste the same as the one in Green Bay or Madison or Sheboygan. Wenger's "cheeseburger" we strive to perfect across all crews on all projects is a great experience for our customers and a great work environment for our employees.

We want all of our people across all of our crews to feel the same level of fulfillment, engagement and happiness working here at Wenger. Happy employees are productive employees and give us our best chance at providing our customers with a great experience across every project every hour of every day.

The focus of Wenger's tomorrow, our next frontier, is training and development. We have made investments in recent years into a full time Human Resource & Recruiting Manager, a Safety Director and a Chief Training Officer. These are not overhead positions that I necessarily want to have for cost reasons in a price driven industry; however the benefit they provide in being able to keep our workforce safe, trained, and equipped to work together to provide our customers with the same great experience from first sale to final nail across SE Wisconsin is priceless.

If you are looking for a building envelope company to partner with on your next roofing or siding project that cares and works hard to elevate the standard in our industry, give us a try. We don't market ourselves as being the lowest bid; however do take pride in **the value we provide Beyond the Specifications.**



This is the Wenger Work Family Story. Thank you for getting to know more about who we are, where we came from and what we stand for.

Jake

BUILDING OUR FUTURE



EST.

1997

HONORING OUR ROOTS

— WENGER CONSTRUCTION, INC. —

A FAMILY BUSINESS DEDICATED TO EXCELLENCE