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The Carron Net Company of Two Rivers: Manufacturer of Sport and Custom Nets

Monograph 76
2001

By: Norman and Fyrne Carron
October 1987

Editor's Note: The Carron Net Company of Two Rivers has been manufacturing fish and sport nets for nearly 70 years. Starting from humble beginnings, the company grew from a few customers to hundreds of commercial fishermen, sporting goods dealers, jobbers and mail order companies throughout the country.

In October of 1987, a brief history outlining the development of the company, titled "History of Carron Net Company, Inc.", was written by Norman and Fyrne (Schumaker) Carron. The article was brought to my attention by Donald J. Schweiger, vice-president of sales & marketing at Carron Net Company, in June of 1997.

We are very happy to be able to reprint this article in its entirety as part of our local history monograph series.

The photographs in the monograph were added to illustrate the rich history of the company. Most of the photos are taken from Carron Net Company files, catalogs and scrapbooks. Two photos appeared in the February 27, 1944 edi-

tion of *The Milwaukee Journal* and are reproduced with permission of the Journal Sentinel News Information Center, Milwaukee. Others are reproduced courtesy Welnetz Studio and the Herald Times Reporter newspaper.

A "Further Reading" section has also been added for historical purposes and for those wishing to "read more about it".

Special thanks are extended to William E. Kiel, Sr., president, Carron Net Company, and Donald J. Schweiger, for their cooperation and assistance, and to Mrs. Norman Carron for granting permission to reprint the history of the company she wrote with her late husband, Norm, more than a decade ago.

Paul Carron, son of Norm and Fyrne Carron, provided additional insights and highlights about the company. His sister, Susan, made available numerous photographs, articles and newspaper clippings in her possession about the Carron family and the Carron Net Company.

We also thank Marge Miley for providing an overview of the company from 1987, when the original typewritten manuscript was completed, to the present.

The original manuscript was entered on a diskette for editing purposes by Mary Jo Deubler. Finally, the design layout and printing of the monograph on acid-free paper were conducted by Karl Schulte of Alling Allprint, Manitowoc.

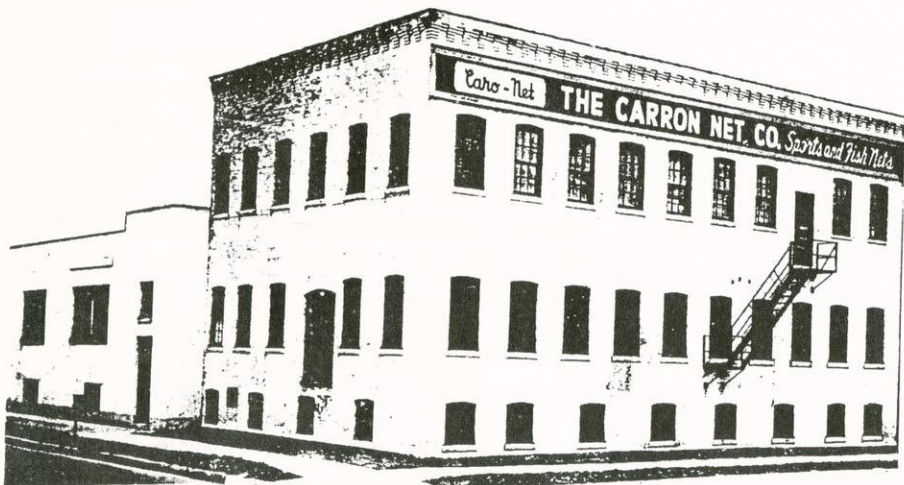
Because of these collective efforts, local historians and researchers now have a complete, updated industrial history of the Carron Net Company of Two Rivers.

Robert P. Fay

HISTORY OF CARRON NET CO., INC.

In 1933 Norman E. Carron and his father Edward W. Carron started making nets by hand in the kitchen of their home at 1103 Harbor Street, Two Rivers, Wisconsin. Family members are still living in this home. They made sucker dip nets and smelt nets and, besides selling them locally, Norman would travel to Green Bay to sell to the Morley Murphy Company and to Milwaukee to sell to Pritzlaff Hardware and the Frankfort Hardware Company. These were the leading hardware companies at that time. Also about this time Norman, his father and other family members started making basketball nets and a few other sports nets. Mrs. Edward Carron would sew top bindings on nets on her home sewing machine.

They had their first price list printed in 1935 and listed basketball, volleyball, tennis, ice hockey goal, golf practice nets and fishing nets. This list was sent to schools, hardware stores and some sporting good stores. Each year Norman would go to the local banks to bor-



Main plant of the Carron Net Company, 1623-17th Street on the southeast corner of 17th and Monroe Streets, Two Rivers. This historic photograph shows how the 2-1/2 story brick commercial building appeared, probably in the 1940s. The undated photo appears on the front cover of a four page pamphlet titled *The Carron Net Co. Story*, on file at the company. The sport and fish net manufacturer's motto at the time was "The Best..Always the Best..For Our Customers..".



Norman Carron (left) and his father, Edward Carron (right) inspecting an aerial cargo net for transporting materials overseas during World War II. Photo appeared with an article on the Carron Net Company in *The Milwaukee Journal* on February 6, 1944. © 1998 Journal Sentinel Inc., reproduced with permission.

row several hundred dollars to buy the necessary inventory to make these nets.

In addition to making nets and doing the bookkeeping and selling for the Net Company, Norman was also a fish broker and sold caviar that he produced from fish eggs from the fisherman. He also took a job in the accounting department at the Hamilton Manufacturing Company in 1936. The Carron Net Company continued in this manner until 1940 when Norman began writing to the defense department appraising them of their ability to make nets for the military. At this time Norman also contacted the Zang Company of Paris, France, for the purchase of net making machines. The Zang machine was considered the best available. However, when the German armies over-ran France in 1940 this source of net machines was eliminated for the duration of the war and a few years later. In December 1941 the Carron Net Company got its first invitation to bid on 10,000 camouflage nets for the Corps of Engineers, U.S. Army. This order was for a 12' x 12' camouflage net, 18 thread twine, 2 1/4"

square mesh, and bound on all sides with a cotton tape and mildew-proofed with copper naphthenate. The amount of this order was \$91,200. Our former bank connection would not loan the money to us so on a Sunday morning Norman approached Mr. H. C. Wilke of the Bank of Two Rivers and told him we needed \$60,000 to perform this solid contract. He told us to go ahead and he would loan us the money.

The netting for these camouflage nets was bought from the R.J. Ederer Company of Chicago. Norman rented a small factory on property now occupied by the Formrite Tube Company. New sewing machines were not available

because of the war, so Norman bought used industrial sewing machines from the Montania Company on Third Street in Milwaukee. Edward Carron and Eugene Carron, Sr., and six employees started making camouflage nets in this factory in January of 1942, while Norman remained at his job with the Internal Revenue Service in Milwaukee until June of that year. Norman and Fyrne Carron drove to Two Rivers every weekend during this six month period to do the bookkeeping, purchasing, banking and other office work. This order was completed on schedule.

In June 1942, the Marine Corps asked Carron Net to make 22,000 camouflage nets in the amount of \$400,000. Norman took a leave of absence from his job with the Internal Revenue Service at this time, rented the former Ford garage at 1906 Washington Street in Two Rivers and hired more people to complete this order.

While this defense work was going on Norman decided that, in order to stay in business after the war was over, they would have to lay the ground work to make sports nets on

a large scale. He contacted government surplus agencies that had used camouflage nets for sale and bought thousands of pounds of these nets. These nets were then cleaned and cut up to make all types of sports nets. Because other netting companies were also engaged in full capacity making camouflage nets for the armed forces, Norman decided that he would use nets made from surplus netting to supply the needs of leading sporting goods companies in the nation. He approached firms like the Rawlings Sporting Goods Company, Wilson Sporting Goods, MacGregor Goldsmith Company and the then Lowe & Campbell Company. These companies were very eager to supply sports nets to their sporting goods customers throughout the nation and were very happy to have us as a supplier. This established a basis for the Carron Net Company to become a leading supplier of sports nets after the war.

However, during this war time period the government called upon the Carron Net Company to manufacture volleyball nets for the armed forces, which were made by hand. These volleyball nets were made of

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We have manufactured all kinds of high grade net goods for 20 years. Our organization is trained to furnish you with the best possible material and workmanship at a reasonable price.

THE CARRON NET CO.
TWO RIVERS, WIS.
TELEPHONE 7842 1019 HARBOR ST.

The first catalog and price list of the Carron Net Company sometime before 1937. It featured tennis, volleyball, golf practice, basketball, ice hockey, sucker and smelt dip nets. Norman Carron sent them out to potential net buyers and carried them in the glove compartment of his car. The first order Norman secured was for a pair of basketball nets from a coach in Delavan, Wisconsin in 1934.



Several French-Canadian families in Two Rivers made nets at home for the Carron Net Company. Shown above is Elite Fontaine LaFond, age 78, wife of Mitchell LaFond, a commercial fisherman at Two Rivers. Photo appeared in *The Milwaukee Journal* on February 27, 1944. © 1998 Journal Sentinel, Inc., reproduced with permission.

1/4" cotton tape because twines were not available for sports nets then. The government supplied the tape for these nets as well as nylon parachute cord for the thousands of aerial cargo nets the Company also made at that time. The Company was also called upon to make thousands of barrage balloon nets under the highest of priorities as these nets were to be used in England and France on D-Day. These balloons were floated in the air above cities and military installations to prevent enemy planes from getting too close and the nets held the grounded balloons when they were not in the air.

Hundreds of people in the city were hired to make all of these nets by hand. Most of these people were descendants of early fishing families and knitting nets by hand came naturally to them. This was a godsend for these people as they could work at home for good extra income.

In 1944 the government asked Carron Net to manufacture fish nets for the lend-lease war program. These nets, because they had a

large mesh, had to be made by hand and this fitted nicely into the work pattern the Company had established. These nets were made for the Russians under the lend-lease program. During this time several more contracts for camouflage nets were completed also.

When the war ended in 1945, the armed forces decided on a program to keep the men in the service busy and entertained and they issued bigger contracts for volleyball nets knitted by hand of cotton tape. It was at this time that Augie Nauman, the owner of a local trucking firm, asked us if we were interested in buying his building at the corner of 17th and Monroe Streets, the site of

the present Carron Net Company Plant 1. His price for the building and land was \$6,500. Fire had damaged the building and it needed extensive repairs. Norman thought this would be an ideal place to permanently set the roots of the Carron Net Company so the building was purchased, cleaned and repaired.

During this period of growth the Company was deeply indebted to Eugene Carron, Sr., who worked with them from the start and who left the Company to serve in the Army Air Corp; and later became part owner of the business. Others who contributed immensely to the success of the business were: Donald Gates and Adolph Grimm. Some of the early sewers for the Company were: Mary Bodwin, Mary Grenier, Sophia Emond, Marcella Kubichek, Orea Rosinsky and many others.

In 1945 a more comprehensive catalog was printed and sent out nationwide. This contained many more sports nets than we had previously made during war time. An extensive advertising campaign was started and the Carron name with its logo "Caro-Net" was advertised widely in the Sporting Goods Dealer, Sports Age, and other sporting goods magazines. Eugene Carron, Sr. and Norman Carron began to go to sporting goods shows in Chicago and New York. Because of the shortage of sports nets during the



Carron Net Company workers making nets. Photo appeared in *The Milwaukee Journal* on February 27, 1944. The caption read "A typical factory scene — the equipment is simple but the workers must be skillful."

war, many dealers and distributors were happy to see another sports net manufacturer in the industry. It was the policy of the Company to give the best nets at the best prices. Soon many sporting goods dealers became Carron Net's good customers.

Also in 1945 a manufacturers representative organization was set up. The first manufacturers representative hired was Les Bellows of New York City. Shortly after Bellows was hired the Company engaged the late Tasker Henderson for representation in the midwest. His physical condition required him to use crutches but he was a successful representative and had in his organization Fred Earl, Fred Farmer and Ed Malloy. Ed Malloy later took over Tasker Henderson's territory.



Edward W. Carron (1890-1965), father of Norman Carron, posed for this photo in Two Rivers for an article that appeared in *The Milwaukee Journal* on Sunday, February 6, 1944. The article's headline was "Fishermen's 'Crazy Idea' Turns Into Big Business."

As a young man, Ed worked on the schooner *The Glen Cuyler* and on the fishing tugs *The Julia C. Hammel* and *The Rough Rider*. He married Errina Grenier in 1914 and they had four children: Norman, Marie (Kiel), Eugene and Marcella (Kubichek). They lived at 1103 Harbor Street in Two Rivers. In the early 1920s Ed worked as an assistant lighthouse keeper in Manitowoc and was later transferred to the Rawley Point lighthouse north of Two Rivers.

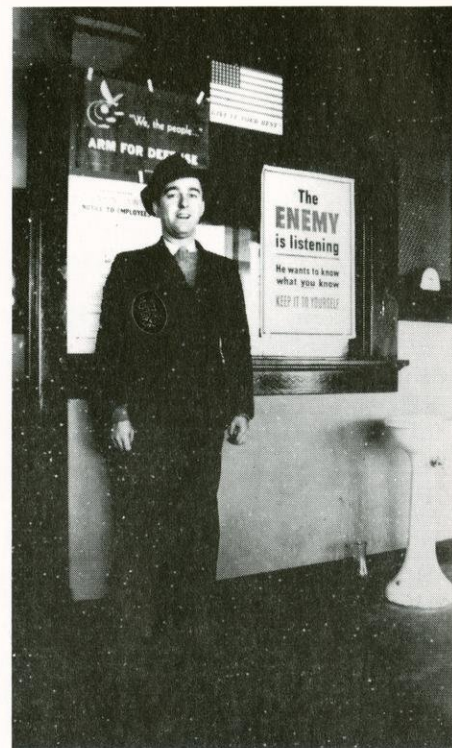
In about 1925 or 1926, because Ed was a very good net maker, he was asked by Norman LeClair and Joseph Bourgeois to be a co-partner in the Rawley Fish Company. The small, frame building still exists along the West Twin River, just north of the 17th Street Bridge on East Street in Two Rivers.

Cotton Lloyd handled sales in the southwest, along with his brothers Alex Lloyd and Ray Lloyd. Pete Buckley, Sr., Pete Buckley, Jr., Emmet Cota and others covered the southeastern part of the country. Some other early representatives for Carron Net were: Bob Curley, Tom Byrd, Butch Coniff and the Niswander organization.

It was about 1948 that the firm was awarded its first General Services contract (GSA). "Caro-Net - Your Best Bet" was on its way to supplying the government National Defense Agencies all over the country with our sports nets. Small gill nets, measuring 3 1/2' by 15', were ordered in great quantities for survival kits.

The GSA contracts continued to come and it is believed that Caro-Net is one of the oldest suppliers, having supplied them from 1948 to the present time, almost 40 years, with first quality nets. However, the above was only a small part of the business. Caro-Net by this time had established itself as a leader in the commercial sports net business in the nation. As a matter of fact, Caro-Net sports nets were requested by 60% of the nation's sporting goods dealers in a poll taken by the magazine "Sporting Goods Dealer" about this time.

In 1953 Norman had to take a six month "sabbatical" from the business because of health problems. This happening, fortunately, made management realize that a reorganization of top leadership had to take place if the life of the Carron Net Company was going to be solid. It was at this time that Eugene Carron, Sr., was pro-



In this 1944 photo, Norman Carron is standing in front of the Carron Net Company office at 1906 Washington Street in Two Rivers. The building later housed the Messerman Furniture Co. and is presently the site of Cool City Cleaners. The war poster on the window warns Americans to keep information to themselves because "The Enemy is listening."

moted to Assistant General Manager and was given part ownership of the Company. Eugene Carron carried on the management of the business along with Edward Carron. Through Fyrne Carron, communication between Norman and the office was accomplished daily and the business kept right on going.

During 1948 we were finally able to purchase a Zang net machine with 202 bobbins with an 18 M/M gauge. This permitted us to manufacture all netting needed. This machine could make the same amount of netting per day as 150 women would be able to make by hand knitting. Undoubtedly this allowed Caro-Net to produce netting much cheaper. However, basketball nets and some heavier netting still had to be knitted by hand. At that time a Zang net machine cost about \$7,500, compared to about \$125,000 for the same machine today. During the Korean war this machine produced 100,000 lbs. of netting for the Korean war effort in Pusan, Korea.

At this time Caro-Net became interested in manufacturing gill net-

ting for the commercial fisherman on the Great Lakes. Several Amita machines were secured from Japan and also a 400 bobbin Zang machine with a 6 M/M gauge was bought. From England we bought one Porlester machine. We soon discovered that these machines could not manufacture the quality of netting needed, and also that this market was very competitive. We did, however, have some success in tuna netting and heavy seine netting for the west coast in Seattle, Portland, and Astoria areas, as well as in the San Diego area. We also began to supply shrimp netting to the Texas and Louisiana areas. However, the disadvantages to this type of market was foreign competition, which held prices down, and consequently was not profitable.

From this period on the business went along nicely and kept increasing yearly. All along we kept adding to our plant capacity and to the downtown plant we built additions in 1948, 1953, 1960 and 1967. In 1976 we acquired land at 27th and Williams Streets and built a 22,500 square foot building where we could make larger protective nets and inside track nets. We also twist our own twines with three Collins twist-ers at this plant. The great amount of space at this plant allowed us to make huge backstop nets for major league baseball parks and also university parks. Prior to this all this work was done on vacant lots out of doors and did not lend itself to the



This photo of Presidential candidate John F. Kennedy was taken in the lobby of the J. E. Hamilton Community House at Two Rivers, where Kennedy made a speech on March 31, 1960. Norman Carron (at right) was active in the Democratic Party in the 1950s and 1960s and was asked to introduce Sen. Kennedy. © Herald Times Reporter, reproduced with permission.

best of working conditions. A few of the major league teams using Caro-Net backstop nets are: Chicago Cubs, White Sox, Kansas City Royals, Minnesota Twins and Milwaukee Brewers. Carron Net track nets are in practically every university in the country.

Like all sporting goods activities, the supply of nets was a constantly changing one. It seems that various sports activities all enjoy their popularity at different times and that also goes for fringe items in the sports

field. Back in the fifties bounce back nets on a stand up frame were very popular. Caro-Net made hundreds of thousands of these and it seemed that every boy had one in his back yard. The same applied to the basketball net, tennis nets, and now the volleyball and soccer nets.

On July 1, 1962, the Carron Net Company became a Corporation. During the earlier years its business structure was a Partnership consisting of Edward W. Carron, Errina Carron, Norman E. Carron and Fyrne Carron. Eugene H. Carron later became a partner and assistant general manager. Norman was the General Manager during those days and Edward Carron was the Factory Manager. The new corporate structure of the firm allowed it to start its Profit Sharing and Pension Plans and other benefits for the employees. For example: The Company provided and gave the highest percentages of wages and salaries, allowed by the IRS, to its Employee Profit Sharing and Pension Plans from 1962 through 1986 - a period of twenty four years.

We were all saddened by the sudden death of Edward Carron on April 26, 1965 at age 75. He was a co-founder of Carron-Net and contributed much to its success. In his later years he was not too active in the Company, but he was always consulted for his ideas and advice in the management of the Company.



Norman Carron (at right), president, Carron Net Company, Two Rivers, receives the National Sporting Goods Association Hall of Fame Award from Willis K. "Kep" Harding (at left) on July 16, 1991 at McCormick Place in Chicago. Other recipients of this prestigious award have included William C. Coleman (camping and outdoor equipment), Ole Evinrude (outdoor motors) and Albert C. Spaulding (general sporting goods).



The Carron Net Company built a second plant facility in 1976 and 1977 so large nets could be made indoors. Prior to that, this work was done outdoors and was governed by weather conditions. The large space indoors allowed the company to increase production and provided more room for twisting machinery to manufacture cordage. The plant is located at 2200-27th Street on six acres of land near the West Twin River in Two Rivers. Photo appeared with an article about the company in the *Herald-Times-Reporter*, July 22, 1979. © Herald Times Reporter, reproduced with permission.

As the 1970's approached the business kept expanding and growing. Tennis became very popular and this period is referred to as the tennis boom. Employment doubled from about 30 to 60 employees. During these years the Company began exporting some of its products overseas to the Caribbean area, Venezuela, Mexico, Canada, Germany and Saudi Arabia.

On November 1, 1972, Errina Carron passed away at the Two Rivers Hospital of a heart attack. She was a director and an early employee of the Company and had given a lot of her time to the Company. Errina Carron and Edward Carron were very much missed as they were with the Company from the beginning.

A few years went by with normal progress in business conditions. Eugene Carron, our Treasurer and Director, became ill in early 1974 and passed away on December 23, 1974 from a heart attack. He was greatly missed as he had been with the Company from its earliest years also.

Younger members of the family were now becoming managers of the Carron Net Company. Each one worked hard at making a success of the Company. They are Paul Carron, Eugene Carron, Jr., Robert Carron, Bill Kiel, and Donald Schweiger. Donald Gates worked at Carron Net his entire working life and recently retired.

THE LAST DECADES & NEW HORIZONS

by Marge Miley

Paul N. Carron, son of Norm and Fyrne Carron, was named president of Carron Net Co. on February 4, 1982. He said, "These were years of strong profits. At the end of each year the corporation contributed the maximum amount allowed by law into the employees profit sharing trust."

New products introduced in-



Carron Net Company Trademark

cluded the Side Range Golf Barrier Nets. These nets covered areas 25 feet high by 150 feet long. They were sold to golf courses to fence off practice ranges.

In 1984 the company landed an order for \$102,000 worth of gill nets from the federal government. This was the result of a hotly contested bid against a competing firm from Upper Michigan. A follow-up order for military cargo nets was secured the next year.

In 1986 the office was modernized with the introduction of a new computer system. Paul Carron said, "This allowed us to set up a detailed customer database to analyze sales trends and improve other office functions."

Entry into the field of custom arcade game nets grew to be a major sales component in the last 1980s. Pages were added to the catalog emphasizing the production of custom made to order nets.

William E. Kiel, Sr. has been president and chief executive officer of Carron Net Co. since 1988. He is a grandson of the founder, Edward Carron, and a nephew of Norman Carron, also a founder of the company which started in 1934. Kiel and the executive management team bought the company from Norman and his wife Fyrne in 1986.

In November of 2000, Kiel, who joined the company in 1961, purchased the ownership interests of the other officers of the company, Donald Schweiger, Eugene Carron Jr. and Paul Carron. He continues as president. His son, William Jr. is vice president and secretary, and his son-in-law Troy Christianson is vice president and treasurer. Robert Carron is production manager.

"We plan no basic change in product at this time," Kiel said. His biggest challenge is to look for new products, and to expand the industrial safety net business in the next five years.

The company's sales territory is 95 percent domestic including the North and South Americas and the Caribbean Islands. The remaining five percent of the sales are overseas.

The company no longer makes fishing nets or basketball nets, but concentrates on volleyball and tennis nets produced at the main plant at 1623-17th Street. The branch



Norman and Fyrne Carron, authors of this monograph, at a Christmas party at Associated Bank in Manitowoc in 1989. Norm served as president of the Carron Net Company from 1962 until his retirement in 1982. He continued as Chairman of the Board until 1986. Fyrne was the only "secretary" at the beginning and she served on the board of directors until she and Norm retired. Norm, at the age of 81, passed away on July 23, 1996. © Welnetz Studio, reproduced with permission.

During his more than 50 years leadership involvement with the Carron Net Co. he directed the design, development and manufacture of the anti-whip basketball net as well as the development and manufacture of fish, camouflage and barrage balloon nets during World War II. He had retired as company president in 1982 and was chairman of the board when he retired from the company in 1986.

In addition to his professional accomplishments, he served on the Two Rivers City Council, was a director of the Bank of Two Rivers for 35 years; served on the Manitowoc County Park and Planning Commission; and was chairman of the United Way. He was affiliated with the Rotary Club, Knights of Columbus and the Elks Club. He also served as vice president of the Two

Rivers Baseball Association.

In 1987, the Rogers Street Fishing Village in Two Rivers honored Norman Carron for his support of many museum projects. In 1989, art work by Edward Carron was donated to the Fishing Village by the Carrons along with a book about Edward Carron and his maritime oil paintings and ship models. Edward Carron learned techniques of paintings from a book. He had no formal training.

The past several years have witnessed the development of line production safety nets used in the back of pallet racks and under conveyor systems to catch products which might fall off, causing product damage or personal injury.

About 20 percent of Carron's overall volume is now in the industrial net field. In the Manitowoc area, Carron supplies conveyor nets for the Mirro/Foley Company.

The company's growth is largely dependent on OSHA mandates which monitor businesses to ensure employee safety and protection for personnel working under conveyor belts or near pallets.

While the company concentrates primarily on volleyball and tennis nets in the sports and athletic fields, Carron also makes protective nets for various sports such as goal posts

plant is at 2200-27th Street where custom type nets are made. The cord for the nets made from DuPont nylon yarn is manufactured at the branch plant.

The company employs 44 men and women in the plants and in the office. There are basically two other full-line net companies in the United States and several small companies, Kiel said. Carron is regarded as an industry leader.

The Carron Net Company has always maintained a safe operation. No major industrial accidents have occurred over the entire history of the firm.

In 1991, Norman Carron, who had retired from the company in 1986, was nominated by owners Bill Kiel, Don Schweiger, Paul Carron and Eugene Carron for the prestigious National Sporting Goods Association Hall of Fame. He was voted into the Hall of Fame and was inducted July 16, 1991 in a ceremony at McCormick Place in Chicago.



Today, Carron Net Company makes a variety of standard recreational volleyball nets for both indoor and outdoor use, as shown in this photo from the company's sales catalog. It also produces made-to-order sports nets for tennis, basketball, baseball, golf, soccer, football, climbing, track and field, and archery.

and backstop nets.

Carron has made large professional baseball backstop nets for the Milwaukee Brewers and Wisconsin Timber Rattlers. Football goal post nets have been made for Camp Randall at the University of Wisconsin in Madison and for the Green Bay Packers at Lambeau Field.

Large fieldhouse net systems, such as batting cage and indoor practice baseball nets, have been made for the U.S. Air Force Academy and for several colleges and univer-

sities including St. Norbert College in DePere, University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh, University of Notre Dame and the University of Indiana. "Our business is very dependent on institutional markets like schools," Kiel said.

A total of 95 percent of all the net used by Carron is manufactured in Two Rivers. The remainder is supplied by special net vendors.

Future growth will depend on developing additional markets, expanding direct mail sales and attending trade shows.

Carron Net Co. Inc., has grown from its humble start making dip nets and fish nets by hand at home in the early 1930s to become a national leader in the field of sports nets and production safety nets.

William E. Kiel, Sr. is the third generation of the family to be at the helm of the company started by his grandfather Edward W. Carron and his uncle Norman E. Carron. Kiel's son, William Jr. represents the fourth generation.

Further Reading

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"Carron Firm Notes 25th Birthday; Honors Veterans". June 7, 1967. Two Rivers, Wisconsin.