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*Steve Anderson
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Anderson carries on Forney family tradition

By Dallas Heltzell
news@bizwest.com

FORT COLLINS—Steven G. Anderson represents the third generation of leadership at Fort Collins-based Forney Industries, an 86-year-old manufacturer and distributor of metalworking and welding products. But while honoring the past, he actively works to build the future.

As a member of the Front Range Community College board of directors, Anderson dedicates his time and company resources to help train welding professionals.

“I really am very passionate about this,” Anderson said. “Blue-collar workers don’t have the same financial ability to go to a four-year college, and we need those skills in the workforce.”

FRCC offers a two-year associate’s degree in welding technology, and when that program started growing, it reached out to Anderson, who was eager to help by offering scholarships.

In 1932, taking a risk during the Great Depression, James Donovan Forney, Anderson’s grandfather, went into business for himself by selling “The Forney Instant Heat Soldering Iron” door to door. He later invented and produced a line of welders as well as auto generators, battery chargers, vacuum cleaners and even a two-seater airplane.

When Forney died in 1986, his son Jack took over as chief executive and board chairman, and his daughter Donna’s husband, Ted Anderson, was named president. Ted and Donna’s son Steven soon was added to the business.

“I started mowing lawns when I was about 12,” Steve Anderson said. “Then they gave me a raise and I started cleaning bathrooms, then filling pop machines. I was finally able to work in manufacturing, where I was winding transformers and manufacturing welders. I also made helmets and assembled other products. I finally moved into sales coordination, pricing out invoices, taking customer-service phone calls and orders.”

Anderson grew restless in the family business, however, “I lost my mind and moved to San Diego for about 14 years,” he said, “but I came back and have been here ever since.

“In 1990, my dad wanted me to be products manager, then vice president for sales and marketing.” When Ted Anderson passed away in 2002, Steve and his sister ran the company, but “it was a pretty rocky road with family issues,” he said. Finally in 2007, Steve Anderson was named president and CEO. Jack Forney died in 2014, leaving the board chairman position to Steve Anderson as well.

That hiatus in Southern California



taught him a lesson he uses today to help Forney Industries remain a leader in its field.

“When I moved to San Diego, I was in architecture and wanted to continue with it,” he said. “When I finished school at San Diego State, I started designing and building homes. But I was doing it on the cheap; I would go out and hire the most inexperienced people I could find, and the cheapest subcontractors, because I thought I could try to make money that way.

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“But that didn’t work,” he said. “What I found out was that to get quality work, you have to hire the best possible people, even if you have to pay them more money. You get a better job.

“So that’s what I’ve tried to do at Forney,” Anderson said. “I hire the best possible person I can find for the money. That’s actually worked pretty well for me. My staff is extremely intelligent, aggressive and much smarter than me — and that helps me look good.”

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Colpaart puts food service on front burner

By Dallas Heltzell

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FORT COLLINS — In her spare time, Ashley Colpaart enjoys inviting people over to play poker and strategy games. If the success of her business strategy is any indication, she'd be a formidable opponent.

Colpaart is co-founder and chief executive of The Food Corridor, a Fort Collins-based virtual food hub that connects food entrepreneurs to commercial kitchen space.

"Mom was a food entrepreneur; she did catering and made hot sauce out of our kitchen," Colpaart said. "Dad was an engineer in the Bay Area. I came to Colorado to work on my Ph.D." in food systems at Colorado State University. A registered dietitian, she also earned a master's in food policy and applied nutrition at Tufts University.

The idea for The Food Corridor came to her when she took her first ride with Uber and thought about its business model of using private vehicles instead of buying them. "I realized access to infrastructure could be more important than ownership," she said. "I realized this 'access economy' could connect food entrepreneurs with underutilized assets" such as

existing commercial kitchens.

Founded in 2016 with help from the \$25,000 she won by taking top honors at a University of Northern Colorado Monfort College of Business Entrepreneurial Challenge, the Food Corridor became the first food tech startup aiming to regionalize food systems through reducing redundancy, increasing efficiencies and providing a seamless interface for anyone seeking commercial kitchens, commissaries, processing, co-packing and food-storage spaces. Its software platform manages scheduling, compliance, time tracking, billing and client communication. The company also moderates the Network for Incubator and Commissary Kitchens, and its app, The Kitchen Door, provides a database of shared-use kitchens in the United States and Canada.

In 2013, she co-founded the Northern Colorado Food Cluster, which worked to promote community economic development and food-systems industry integration in the region.

Colpaart contributes to the community by meeting with other early-stage entrepreneurs, speaking at startup weeks and through groups such as Galvanize and Innosphere.



She also sends monthly updates to community members and her investors "that helps people track where I'm at, decisions I'm making as an executive."

Those investors are all from Colorado, Colpaart said.

"I raise all my seed money in Colorado," she said. "Everybody says you have to go to the coasts for investors, but I was able to raise it with angels and venture capitalists all in Colorado."

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 Entrepreneur

Ashley Colpaart
 The Food Corridor

She didn't plan it that way, she said, "but it just kind of happened. It means I've met all my investors in person and they know me."

Those personal interactions energize her, she said, as does her company's mission.

"We're solving a real-world problem, bringing value to a new, emerging sector that's exciting," Colpaart said. "Everything we do is customer centered."

Harter warms to role of youth, business mentor

By Dallas Heltzell

news@bizwest.com

FREDERICK — Paul Harter knows how to make your recreational vehicle warm and cozy. He also knows how to light a fire under Northern Colorado's next generation of leaders.

As president and chief executive of Frederick-based Aqua-Hot Heating Systems, Harter carries on founder Harold "Hap" Enander's vision of providing quiet, reliable and consistent interior heat and continuous on-demand hot water in RVs. But he also carries on Enander's passion for finding ways to brighten the future for area youths.

"One of the last things Hap told me before he died was, 'Take my assets and continue my work.'" Harter said. So Harter founded and chairs the Enander Family Foundation, which has given more than \$2 million to youth programming in Northern Colorado. Through a \$1 million endowment, the foundation took the gift of a dude ranch north of Masonville from the Ward family and turned it into a youth camp and community retreat center, Sky Corral Ranch.

Harter also teaches at Front Range Community College, conducts company-culture seminars and serves on a state workforce board, pursuing

partnerships between high schools, colleges, businesses and industries. He was a co-founder of the NoCo Manufacturing Partnership, which won a BizWest Bravo! award in 2017.

"But all that," he said, "came out of making RV heaters. People can have interior heat and hot water out of one little box. You can have an endless hot shower in your RV; as long as there's water and fuel, we've got all the hot water you want."

Enander founded the company as Vehicle Systems Inc. in 1984 to manufacture and sell various RV accessories. As the business grew, he knew it needed additional leadership and hired Harter, an Illinois native, to improve quality control and help it diversify into other RV-based products and industries.

"Most of my work had been in the computer and automotive industry," Harter said. "I made components for computer disk drives, and went from there to the automotive service parts industry and to a Chrysler engine and cockpit assembly plant. But I loved Colorado because my mom lived in Leadville so I spent my summers out here."

"One of the first things I did was talk to Hap about changing the company's name and brand image," he said. "We went to our first trade show



as Vehicle Systems, but people saw our Aqua-Hot and Hydra-Hot products on display and they were confused. They thought we were a dealer. So I told him, 'Everybody knows us as Aqua-Hot. It's time to follow that horse to the water it wants to drink.'"

Harter became president of the company when Enander died in 2009. In addition to the RV line, Aqua-Hot now produces the Work Ready line of hydronic heating sys-

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 Outlying
 Communities

Paul Harter
 Aqua-Hot Heating
 Systems

tems for commercial fleets, school buses, industrial and oilfield applications.

Harter retains his titles at Aqua-Hot, but "I stepped back in January, promoted my chief financial officer to general manager and gave the team a chance to grow," he said. Now he has more time to pursue his various roles in workforce development in Northern Colorado, he said, because "the men and women of Aqua-Hot gave me the freedom."

Prechts meet divergent needs at Vergent

By Dallas Heltzell
news@bizwest.com

LOVELAND — Teaching can be rewarding, but Terry Precht decided he'd rather be doing. That's how Loveland-based Vergent Products was born in 1995.

"I started this company because I like to design and build things," he wrote on the company's website. "While I was a professor of mechanical engineering for 10 years (at the University of Idaho), I missed the opportunity to build the things I was designing and changed my career path to allow me to be exposed to the opportunities that would allow the products I was designing to be built. As I launched my career in private industry, I was able to design products that were very high volume, giving me a great appreciation for design for manufacturability, and manage a large team of talented engineers ...

"At Vergent Products, I have been proud of the diversity and number of products we have designed and manufactured for our clients, ranging from Doppler radar-based golf products to specialized contamination analyzers for the metals foundry industry. In particular, I enjoy the learning opportunities a new client's products present in technical chal-

lenge and understanding their market applications. This ability to learn from our clients fuels that same enjoyment I got when I was in the classroom."

Terry Precht told BizWest that he started Vergent on the suggestion of a friend and mentor. "I was working at a venture-funded startup that was not going to survive, and he suggested I start my own company — and away we went."

Terry Precht is president and chief executive at Vergent, while his wife, Diana, serves as vice president. She gained marketing experience as director of a chamber of commerce in Canby, Ore., south of Portland. Its 150 member businesses all had different needs and motives, she wrote, so "it wasn't a difficult transition to Vergent. Our customers all had different needs too.

"As we have grown, my role moved from generalist to client engagement. Now, the exciting part about my contribution is that I am able to work with people who have an idea, a working prototype or a developed product allowing me to participate in the evolutionary process of continually elevating our client's product."

Diana Precht contributes to the community through work with nonprofits including McKee Medical Center's foundation, which raises



money for health-related needs.

She likened her role to her hobby of growing dahlias.

"This nurturing of the plant and the subsequent amazing bouquet that I create and share with everyone at the office is not unlike our philosophy at Vergent Products," she said. "We think of every new client as someone who is about to embark on a journey of producing an incredible product. We work together to support and nurture that effort and

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—

Loveland

**Terry and Diana
Precht**
Vergent Products

in the end, the results can be something truly amazing."

"Being an entrepreneur is a matter of having the intestinal fortitude to see your way through any barrier that might come up, whether it's financial, technical or personnel. Those all occur," Terry Precht said. "We work with a lot of startup companies, and we get a lot of exposure to the ones who work well and not quite so well. That learning makes us better."

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Realtor Springfield works at keeping it real

By Dallas Heltzell
news@bizwest.com

GREELEY — Ever hear stories about the executive who started out working in the mailroom? Sometimes they're true. Just ask Chalice Springfield.

As a 19-year-old student at the University of Northern Colorado in Greeley, studying to be an elementary-school teacher, Springfield needed a part-time job. A notice on a 3-by-5-inch index card posted on a UNC bulletin board advertised an opening in the mailroom at a real-estate firm then known as "Sears and Company: THE TEAM."

Then managing broker Joe Whisenand offered Springfield the job — and 27 years later, she's managing broker herself at Sears Real Estate, and chief executive to boot.

"It wasn't a direct line from mailroom to CEO," she said. "During my career, I have also worked in the title industry, sold real estate with Sears and worked in the mortgage industry. Thirteen years ago, the company called me and asked if I would come back to Sears and be their leader and managing broker. I accepted, and it's where I find myself today as the line leader for about 60 people."

Springfield also has a coaching and training company, Unstoppable

Curiosity, where she works with private coaching clients and conducts training and motivational workshops. "Unlike most people in the world who would rather die than speak in public," she said, "it's actually something that brings me great joy and happiness because I feel like I am making a difference for others."

Springfield was a board member at the Weld Food Bank and still sits on some of its committees and volunteers in its warehouse. She also serves on the board of North Range Behavioral Health. Her list of volunteer work includes the Immigrant and Refugee Center, Partners Mentoring Youth and the IRES Board. She also created a "Greeley's Great Group" of leaders to be champions for the community.

"Woody Allen is attributed as saying, '80 percent of success in life is showing up.' While I think this is true, it needs a little more oomph," Springfield said. "You can't just show up without a level of integrity and presence. Integrity — being your word and doing what you say you're going to do — creates workability in life. Integrity is something that people value and appreciate. When others can count on you not just to show up but to really do your best at what you've committed to, that contributes



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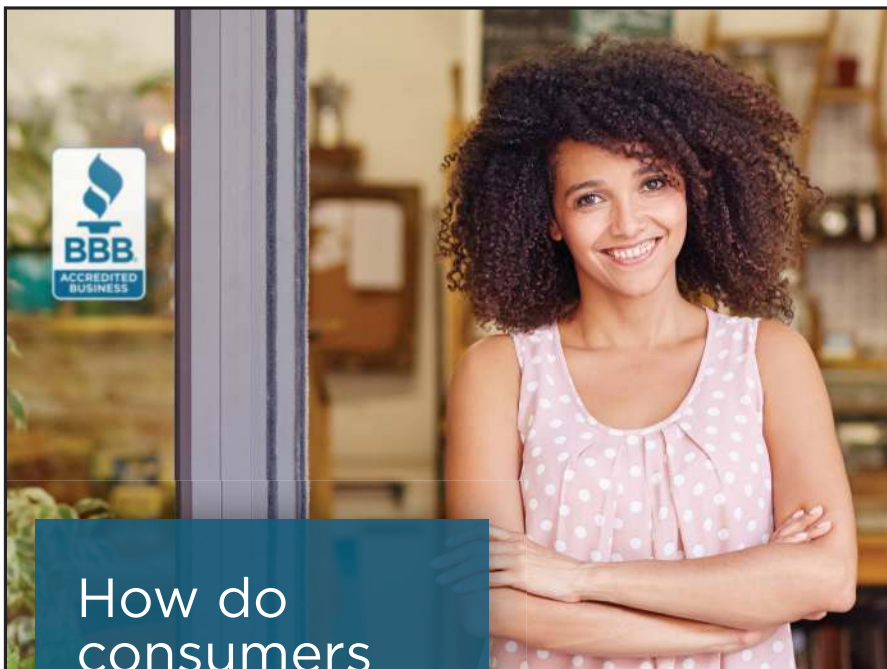
Chalice Springfield
Sears Real Estate

first to relationships, which lead to success. Integrity is one of my core commitments. I feel like I show up in my career, in my community and in my life.

"I am passionate about creating a life I love that fills me up, and I am privileged to do that in Greeley because I absolutely love this community and the people in it," she said. "I grew up in Colorado Springs and never felt a sense of community and place as I do here in Greeley."

Springfield also is devoted to balancing success in business with meaning in life.

"My idea of success is moving away from checklists and 'doing' and busyness to presence, connection, slowing down and fulfilling experiences," she said. "I certainly don't have it figured out. I am still motivated to do my best — and, I also desperately want time away from email and my cell phone to take a hike with my husband in nature."



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EKS&H congratulates the honorees and finalists of the Bravo! Entrepreneur Awards.

Ranch-Way feeds family pride for Szidon

By Dallas Heltzell
news@bizwest.com

FORT COLLINS — “I take the most pride in the fact that my family was involved with the oldest continuing operating business in Fort Collins for nearly 50 years,” said Bonnie Szidon. “It was an incredible accomplishment to have that business prosper and grow.”

That business is Ranch-Way Feeds, which started as Lindell Mill in 1868. Back then, the mill along the banks of the Cache la Poudre River processed locally grown wheat into flour. Eighty years later, the business converted to producing feed for livestock, and in the modern era has concentrated on commercial feed, specialty products including organic feed and wholesale bagged feed.

Szidon retired as president of the company in 2016 when Ranch-Way, known for its tall grain bins near downtown Fort Collins, was sold for \$1.51 million to Hubbard Foods, a wholly owned subsidiary of Mankato, Minn.-based Ridley USA Inc.

“My family got involved in 1968 with a group of investors buying the feed mill when it came up for sale,” Szidon said. “A number of those investors were relatives. When we bought it, the business was nearly bankrupt and

there was a terrible interest rate. So we went through the ups and downs.

“Back in 1968 I was in high school and frankly wasn’t paying much attention to the business,” she said. “I was growing up and having fun.” But her mother, Phyllis Bixler, ran the newly acquired company with an iron hand.

A key decision that saved the business was hiring Henry Owings to manage the mill, she said. “We found a person who had been in the feed industry, unlike the investors we’d had. He knew what we needed to do. They were from Maryland. So that was the first thing we had to do, was change the management, tighten the belt, and pay the bank over 20 percent interest on borrowed money. We were very lucky to have survived it.

“Mother grew up during the Depression and did not want money borrowed. So we paid off all of our debt and eventually bought out all of our other shareholders. Then we paid for everything and could make our own decisions,” she said. “After six years, the management changed again. My husband, Kim Szidon, joined us, and worked at Ranch-Way from 1986 to when we sold it.”

Kim’s strong suit was his experience in manufacturing, running machinery and managing a crew,”



she said. “He had a construction background, and the mill always needed a lot of work because it was a very old facility. It’s always been adapted and retooled.”

Szidon’s mother passed away in 2011, leaving Bonnie as president, her husband as general manager and her brother, Joe Bixler, as controller.

“The love of working for our family and the feeling I was working for myself as well was great,” she said.

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Fort Collins

Bonnie Szidon
Ranch-Way Feeds

“Just being able to make your own decisions is the most gratifying thing in a business.

“It felt so good to provide an essential service,” Bonnie Szidon said. “So many people have animals and need feed. We supplied the best feed possible to feedlots, horse barns, 4-H. People loved the culture we had built at Ranch-Way.

“More than me, the business deserves the award.”

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In NoCo, where there's water, there's Wind

By Dallas Heltzell
news@bizwest.com

BERTHOUD — No one knows the importance of water better than a farmer on Colorado's arid eastern plains. So when Eric Wilkerson retired after 24 years as general manager of the Berthoud-based Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District, it was an easy decision to promote someone who grew up on such a farm to fill the position.

Brad Wind, who was named general manager of Northern Water in April, is still involved in his parents' farming operation near Brush, raising corn and winter wheat on nearly 1,000 irrigated acres.

"Growing up on that farm, I realized the value of water," Wind said, "So after graduating from Brush High School" — home of perhaps Colorado's best team name, the Beetdiggers — "I tended to veer toward water resource management." Wind received bachelor's degrees in civil engineering and agricultural engineering from Colorado State University, then earned master's degrees in business administration from CSU and in agricultural engineering from the University of California at Davis.

"After going to school for way too long," he said, "I landed at Northern Water and never looked back."

He joined the utility in 1994 as an engineer, and served as assistant general manager of Northern Water's administration and operations divisions before ascending to the top job at the organization that manages storage and transportation of water from the Western Slope to nearly 1 million customers in eight Front Range counties.

Wind is the sixth general manager in Northern Water's 81-year history. Before Wilkinson, there was J.M. Dille, J.R. "Bob" Barkley, E.F. Phipps and Larry Simpson.

Wind knows there won't be smooth sailing on Northern's water.

"There will be plenty of challenges for folks to figure out where we're going in this era of limited resources," he said. "We find ourselves at a time of transitioning our systems to be able to provide water supplies to more municipalities on a 24/7 basis."

Advancing the Windy Gap firming project is a big item on the agenda, he said, as is winning final U.S. Army Corps of Engineers approval for the bitterly contentious Northern Integrated Supply Project, which has been on the drawing board for 15 years.



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Regional
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Brad Wind
Northern Water

NISP would provide approximately 40,000 acre-feet of water each year to more than a dozen cities and towns and four water districts. If approved, NISP's two reservoirs would store a total of more than 215,000 acre-feet of water.

"Allowing for those projects would meet the gap in water supply that's crystal clear to us as we look at the data" of growth along the northern Front Range, Wind said. However, he

added cautions typical of the farmer he is.

"We need to have a thoughtful discussion around an entire region that's sensitive to the needs of agriculture, and not promoting things that lead to buying farms and drying those farms up," Wind said. "In that interim period, we'll have great conversations about the limitation of water, questioning how much is taken off of irrigable lands."

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