

A glimpse at the ways Ken and Diane have changed the Beloit landscape

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One of nine sisters, Diane Hendricks grew up on a small dairy farm. Ken Hendricks was also born and raised in Wisconsin and worked side-by-side with his father, a roofer, for many years.

Although Ken did not complete high school, in 1982 he was able to launch ABC supply with Diane, whom he married in 1975.

After the company got off the ground, it was able to be grown into the leading wholesale roofing and exterior products distribution company in the United States.

With the tremendous success of ABC Supply came new opportunities for creating new business divisions and billions of dollars for the Hendricks family.

Despite their success, the Hendricks stayed in the Stateline Area to live, work and give back to the community whenever possible.

From working with the Stateline Boys and Girls Club to repurposing decaying manufacturing sites, the Hendricks have left a tremendous impact on the Greater Beloit area.

“Many have not been able to come up with a strategic vision that could come up with viable reuses for some of the locations in Beloit,” said Beloit City Manager Larry Arft. “Ken and Diane Hendricks have been able to do things that are almost at a miracle level.”

In 2007, Ken was named one of America’s richest people. Later that year he passed away following a construction-related accident at his home.

After Ken’s death, Diane took over operations of the company. Since then, ABC has continued to grow to having more than 450 locations.

“The Hendricks have done about as much as any family could ever be expected to do for their community,” Arft said. “The city fathers are deeply grateful of both Ken and Diane’s involvement and it’s unusual to find a community that has been blessed as we have.”

Here is a glance at a few of the many projects and causes Ken and Diane Hendricks have supported in the City of Beloit:

THE FORMER FAIRBANKS MORSE FACILITY

Fairbanks Morse Engine has been a staple in the Stateline Area since the late 1880s. For years the company produced a wide array of products from radios to washing machines.

In the latter half of the 20th century, the company began to focus on the production of diesel and dual-fuel engines, leaving previously occupied manufacturing spaces empty.

“The old buildings that were made surplus to Fairbanks Morse sat as an old shell looking over the riverfront for decades,” Arft said. “The Hendricks were able to reuse a number of those buildings.”

After an extensive renovation process, what used to be an eyesore on the east side of the Rock River became the home of ABC Supply’s World Headquarters.

With a shining white exterior, large windows and red roof, the facility has complemented Riverside Drive, Riverside Park and the view from Beloit’s West Side.

“Those buildings would still be sitting vacant today if it wasn’t for Ken and Diane picking them up and coming up with dynamic ways to use the buildings,” Arft said. “Those improvements have been dramatic and essential to Beloit’s modern renaissance.”

THE BELOIT IRONWORKS

In 1858 the Beloit Corporation was founded by entrepreneurs Orson E. Merrill and George Houston. In 1885 the business became known as the Beloit Ironworks.

Just over 100 years later, the business would be diminished, and its 25 acre campus, complete with multiple buildings, would be falling into disarray, and the Hendricks family would commit to saving it.

“It was an incalculable contribution to Beloit,” Arft said.

In the beginning, the Beloit Corporation was one of the world’s leaders in the manufacturing of paper-making machines. For many years the tradition would continue.

In 1986 the company was sold to Milwaukee-based Harnischfeger and by the late 1980s business was booming and better than ever.

Only 10 years later, however, the tides began to change and the Beloit Corporation began to experience troubles. Harnischfeger filed for bankruptcy in 1999, and so marked the end of a manufacturing era in Beloit.

During its heyday, the Beloit Corporation employed more than 3,500 Stateline Area residents. On Sept. 8, 1999, the remaining 1,100 employees found out they were losing their jobs.

Rather than watch the buildings located along the Rock River fall apart and become an eyesore, the Hendricks invested millions into the facility to bring it back to life.

Throughout the renovation process, careful attention was paid to original details of the building in hopes of fusing old and new in harmony.

On the exterior of the Ironworks facility, the Hendricks financed art made of hanging buckets, gears and photographs from the building's history.

Inside, attention was paid to use manufacturing parts as art installations. Brick was also left exposed in some interior spaces.

"They really wanted to celebrate the city's industrial past," Arft said. "We're grateful — imagine what the heart of downtown would look like if the buildings had continued to sit."

Over the past several years tenants have flocked to the Ironworks, including Beloit Regional Hospice, Universal Acoustic and Emission Technologies and more.

"Because of the Hendricks' efforts, hundreds of new jobs were brought back to Beloit," Arft said.

Most recently, CrossFit Beloit, a facility for athletic training, leased space at the Ironworks. Their grand opening celebration is planned for Sept. 14.

BELOIT REGIONAL HOSPICE

Founded by Beloit Clinic oncology and internal medicine specialist Dr. Burton VanderLaan, Beloit Regional Hospice has been helping families since 1982.

The organization's philosophy is to allow people to be kept comfortable at home and close to their friends and family at the end of life.

In the mid-2000s, Beloit Regional Hospice received some help from the Hendricks, moving the organization's offices from Prairie Avenue to completely renovated offices at the Ironworks facility in downtown Beloit.

“Being downtown helps us be conveniently located for the area that we serve,” said Sarah Kruse, director of marketing and development for Beloit Regional Hospice. “We can serve families in both Illinois and Wisconsin.”

In addition to providing space for the center, the Ken Hendricks Granting Wishes Fund was founded at Beloit Regional Hospice in 2008.

The fund generates income to be used for special requests that support quality of life for the patients in hospice care and their families.

The Ironworks facility has proven to be the perfect fit for Beloit Regional Hospice’s growing needs, Kruse said, noting the organization may soon lease additional space at the location.

THE ECLIPSE CENTER

In 1966 a shopping plaza that would become known as Beloit Plaza and Beloit Mall was built atop a hill overlooking the Rock River .

By the end of the 1990s, the glory days were gone. Tenants were leaving in droves, and in 2000 the mall, with the exception of an anchor store, Elder-Beerman, was closed.

Rather than watch the location, which is located next to ABC Supply’s offices and a neighborhood, fall into complete disrepair, Ken and Diane purchased the property in 2004.

Their idea: create a convention center to bring events to the city of Beloit and facilitate spaces for area organizations and businesses to locate.

In March 2007 Hendricks Development Group announced the idea would become reality, and the Eclipse Center was established.

“It really was a dead mall and a failed retail project,” Arft said. “Something retail wasn’t going to work in that location and Ken and Diane Hendricks figured out what would.”

Named after the Eclipse Windmill Company which had been located on the property and eventually merged with Fairbanks Morse, the space was overhauled, both inside and out.

Renovations to create health offices and space for charter schools at the location were later completed. In 2009 Blackhawk Technical College opened a center at the Eclipse Center.

Today the Eclipse Center’s convention space, located at what was center court of the old shopping mall, can accommodate groups of 25 to 1,000.

“The convention space is used extensively by the city every year and has dozens of private rentals,” Arft said. “It’s been a good fit.”

BELOIT INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL (BIFF)

Inspired by art and film, the Hendricks approached community cultural leaders with the idea to begin a local film festival.

In 2005 the Beloit International Film Festival (BIFF) was founded as a way to recognize filmmakers and benefit local citizens. In 2006 the first event took place.

“Diane and Ken Hendricks were very involved from the start and they have lead the way as our title sponsor,” said Rod Beaudoin, BIFF executive director. “Diane is still very involved.”

Today there are more than a dozen venues participating in BIFF each year. The venue sizes range from 40 seats to more than 700.

“We’re arguably one of the best festivals in the state and are internationally recognized,” Beaudoin added.

In 2012 BIFF premiered BIFF Latino and a student filmmaker showcase where youth ages 12-18 could submit their work.

The film festival also has presented American Sign language films so that the deaf and hard of hearing could enjoy the festivities.

Beaudoin says that planning for the 2013 BIFF began in March and there will be plenty to be excited about Feb. 14-17.

“We’re going to be doing BIFF plus music,” he said. “There will be original acts in the evening starting at 10 p.m. on Saturday and Sunday.”

Educational opportunities for youth to be involved with BIFF are also being extended to include students in elementary, middle and high school.

“The Hendricks’ are really helping us to provide an environment where the arts can be brought to a relatively small city,” Beaudoin said.

HENDRICKS CENTER FOR THE ARTS

Located at the corner of Grand Avenue and Pleasant Street in downtown Beloit, the Hendricks Center was gifted to Beloit College by Diane Hendricks.

As part of the original arrangement with the City of Beloit, Diane Hendricks was transferred ownership of the old library. In turn, she gave the building to the college as a completed facility.

“The facility is spectacular and one of the gems at Beloit College,” said Jeff Puckett, vice president for development and alumni relations at Beloit College.

The location used to be a post office and also housed the Beloit Public Library for many years. It now houses Beloit College’s dance and music programs.

“It’s also used by faculty in other departments and is had an impact far beyond the film and dance departments,” Puckett added.

Renovations to the building cost about \$4 million in order to make the facility suitable for the college’s needs.

Workers raised ceilings and even tore off portions of the roof to create an orchestral, practice, studio and film classrooms as well as staging labs.

“One of the neat things about the facility is that while there are modern features, there are also elements where you can see the integrity of the previous architecture,” Puckett said.

During the construction process the Beloit Public Library was transferred to its current space at the Eclipse Center, which was formerly a JC Penney store.

“The entire area was gutted inside and out and rebuilt to benefit the community,” Arft said.

In 2010 the Hendricks Center for the Arts opened for classes. Reviews from students, staff and visitors have been positive.

“People always say ‘wow’ when they walk in and see the facility for the first time,” Puckett said.

Ken served on the Beloit College Board of Trustees from 1998-2007. Diane began serving on the board in 2011.

“The contributions that they have brought to the table are beyond philanthropic — they encouraged all of us to think in new ways,” Puckett said.

From refusing to be deterred by obstacles while reinventing parts of Beloit College, to being continual financial supporters of the college’s projects, the Hendricks have made a huge impact on campus.

“It’s been incredible for everyone who has worked with them,” Puckett said. “The question often was ‘what if,’ and they encouraged the organization to reimagine as opposed to just doing something else...they are problem solvers and they are committed to the community in a way that I find extremely

humbling.”