

B E C O M I N G  
ARDENT

A STORY ABOUT PEOPLE, PASSION & FAMILY

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# ARDENT

**[ar-dent]:** characterized by intense feeling: passionate, devoted, eager, authentic, professional, enthusiastic, keen, knowledgeable, caring, committed.

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### co.Presidents' Message

It would be an oversimplification to refer to this book as a corporate history book, yet that is how the process started. We were driven by a desire to capture the timeline and stories of the business, but after reading the first draft we realized the result transcended the business. Glen and Pat White officially started Glen White Industries in 1976, but the White family entrepreneurial drive started generations earlier. Glen seemed to be destined to own a business, but his forefathers also modeled socially conscious behaviors that had profound impacts on his success in life.

There are three constants throughout the story; people, passion, and family. From his first days as an employer, Glen recognized the responsibility he had, not just for his employees, but also for the families. Family was the foundation for his philosophy as a business owner; treat people like you would treat your family. Without the people surrounding the business there would be no business. With this in mind, Glen knew that he and Pat were not the only stakeholders in the business. Realizing that employees, customers, vendors, and the community were critical components to success, he felt privileged to reward them. This attitude paid great dividends to Glen and everyone surrounding him. An attitude that he was able to pass to his children and will be passed to his grandchildren.

Glen faced every challenge in life head on with passion and alacrity. From growing tobacco to manufacturing buildings to fighting cancer, his infectious spirit attracted people to his winning team. Although Glen supplied the vision for the business, it was the people along that way that truly built the successful business. Motivated by Glen's passion, the people surrounding the business have accomplished more than can be recorded in ten books. Our family owes many thanks to a lengthy list of names for the contributions they have made to the business, our industry, and our community.

We are privileged to be able to build on the solid foundation that Glen and Pat poured for us. We have accepted responsibility of rewarding the business stakeholders, whom we have adopted as family members, and take great pride in our impacts during the past decade. If wealth is measured as the quality of the people surrounding us, we are truly rich people. This book has been written as a thank you for all the wonderful people of the past, present, and future, that make our extended family amazing.

Jason & Bryan White  
co.Presidents  
Steelway Building Systems and  
Ardent Industries Ltd.



## Introduction

In 2016, the 40th anniversary year of Steelway Building Systems, company owners Jason and Bryan White founded Ardent Industries Ltd. to position the affiliated companies of Steelway Building Systems, ExSteel Building Components and Zelus Material Handling for further growth in the future. The name Ardent was chosen for carrying with it the notion of being passionate, authentic and caring—expressions of value-driven family entrepreneurship that are at the core of the identity of Steelway and its sister companies. It all started with a heritage of private entrepreneurship, community involvement and their father, Glen White's, lifelong passion for building things. This is the story of the people who made it all happen.....



FOUNDATIONS

01



## Family Background: Leaving England and Coming to America

The White family has what can only be described as a truly storied history. The story begins in September 1620 when William White and his wife, Susanna, boarded the Mayflower in Plymouth, England, as part of a group that has claimed its spot in American history as the Pilgrims. It was no doubt a time of wonder, excitement and most likely uneasiness when William and his highly pregnant wife left from Plymouth, as there was no telling what their journey across the Atlantic might bring.

After reaching the coast of Massachusetts, and before going ashore, William White became one of the 41 signees of the Mayflower Compact, the first governing document of what would eventually become the Plymouth Colony. This was

a significant moment in early U.S. history and one that has made the Whites part of a group of families that history books to this day portray as being among the founders of the modern United States. Yet, it was not the only distinction that has given William and Susanna White a place in the annals of American history. Their son, Peregrine White, was born on November 20, 1620 aboard the Mayflower while the ship was docked in Provincetown Harbour, Massachusetts, making him the first English child born to Pilgrims arriving in the New World.

Descendants of William and Susanna White lived in the 13 colonies and became American citizens when the United States won their independence from England in 1776. However, it would not be until the early 1800s that New York State-born Ira Allen White (1796-1887), a direct descendant of Peregrine and an ancestor of Glen White, the founder of Steelway,

would move north to settle in Canada. Ira's mother was Suzanna Franklin, a great niece of Benjamin Franklin, one of the Founding Fathers of the United States. In 1813, when Ira was 17 years old, he enlisted in the U.S. army. After being employed in the later portion of the War of 1812, he was discharged in 1815 with the rank of Captain, and in the transition to civilian life became a millwright by trade.

## Moving to Canada

In 1817, while living in Rochester, New York, Ira White met a Mr. Slade from Galt, today a part of the city of Cambridge in southwestern Ontario. Mr. Slade invited Ira to make the trek through the bush and beyond the waters of Lake Ontario to build a grist mill in Galt. Ira accepted the invitation, and, together with his building equipment, travelled to Upper Canada (today's province of Ontario). The equipment was brought by ship to Burlington, where it was loaded onto oxen

wagons and transported to the Township of North Dumfries where Galt was located. After arriving in the Scottish stronghold of Galt, Ira, together with two other men, built mills in Galt, Preston and Hespeler (later amalgamated in 1973 and named the City of Cambridge), before moving on to Markham Township, in the early 1820s.

Following the end of the Napoleonic wars, the 1820s were a time of mass migration from Europe. Mills went up in many new locations where people settled as access to lumber and mills to produce flour was crucial for the establishment and growth of villages and towns. Ira's move to the Markham area was prompted by many new opportunities to leave his mark as a builder. Within a short period after arriving, he had built several new mills in locations including Unionville, Stouffville, Dickson's Hill and German Mills. In 1821, while building another large, three-story flour mill for Peter Reesor, Ira fell in love with Peter's daughter, Elizabeth. They were married

shortly after, started a family together and settled on a farm on the Rouge River in the Markham area.

## Establishing Family Roots in Springwater, Ontario

Life was challenging in rural Upper Canada in the early 1800s. In the absence of modern medicine, mortality rates were high. As was typical for families in those Pioneer days, five of Ira and Elizabeth's ten children died at an early age. When Elizabeth passed away in late 1852, Ira began looking for new opportunities for work beyond Markham Township. That same year, he and his son, Anthony B. White, relocated to the Springwater area, located between today's communities of Aylmer and St. Thomas and about 40 kilometers southeast of London, Ontario.



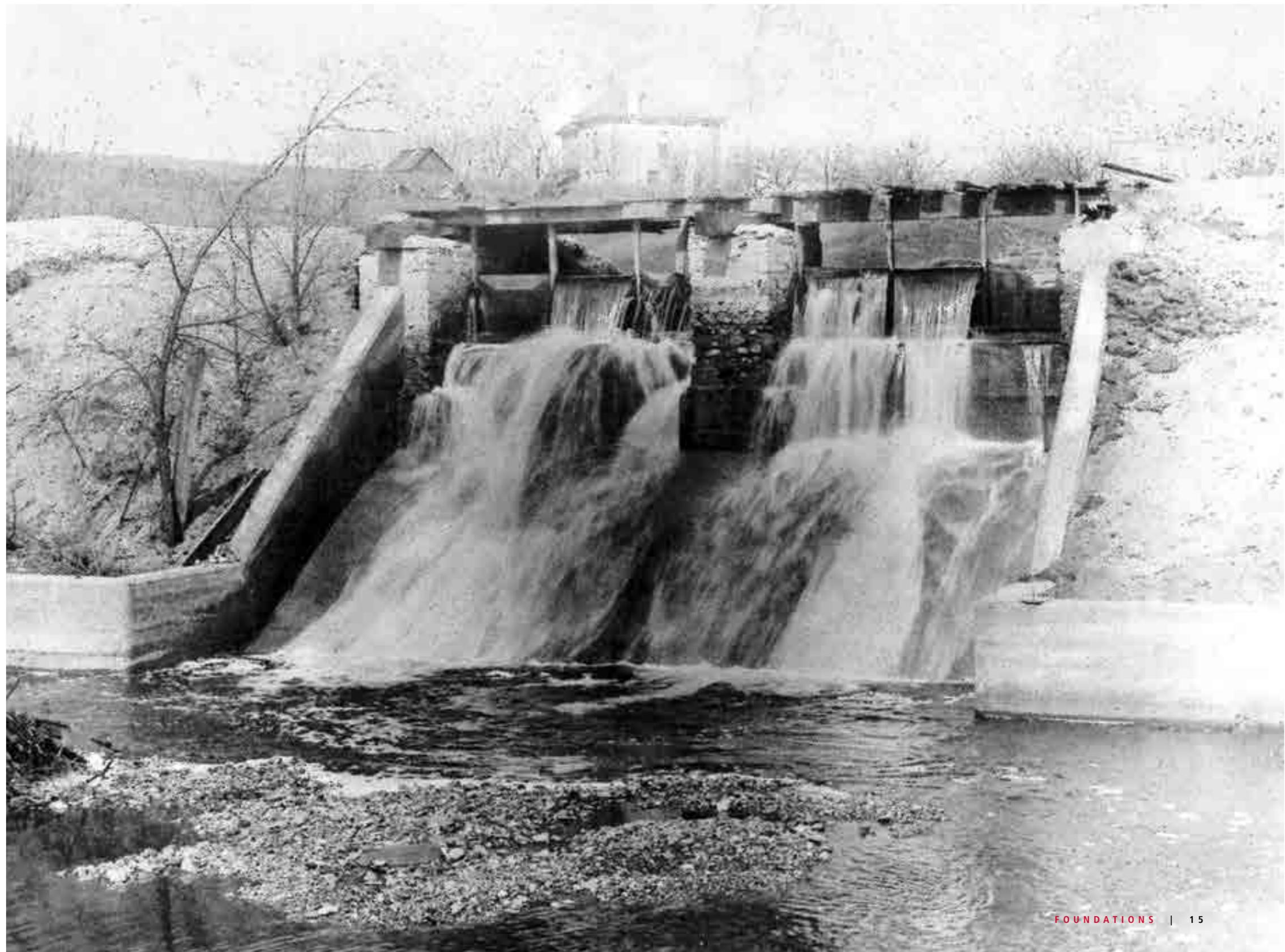
Ira Allen White

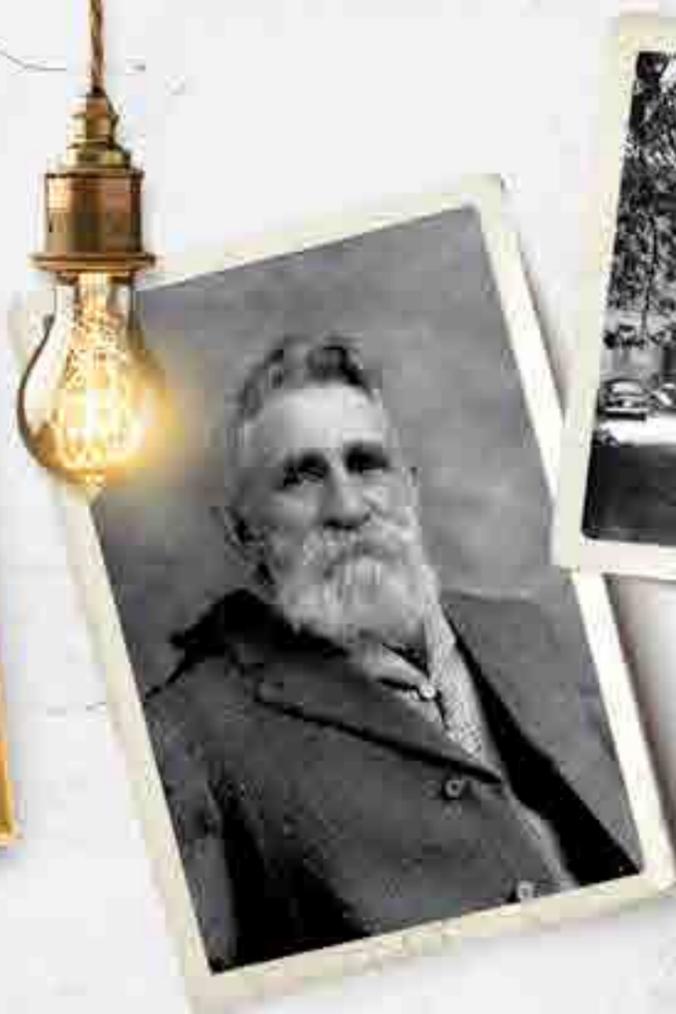




For the Whites, the move meant becoming pioneers again in an area that was still in its early stages of development. St. Thomas was first settled in 1810 and received village status in 1852, the same year that Ira and Anthony arrived in nearby Springwater with the intention of building mills and helping to cultivate the area. Similarly, Aylmer had started out as a cross roads settlement (Hodgkinson's Corners) with the arrival of the first settler in 1817. Smaller than St. Thomas, it was only in 1872 that Aylmer would have enough residents to be granted status as a village.

Springwater turned out to be a great choice for the Whites, as the area's natural resources were vast and there was plenty of opportunity. Following their arrival, they purchased 429 acres of land on either side of Springwater Road, where Steelway is located today. The property included large swaths of wooded area that would serve as an important source of virgin timber for the sawmill, as well as a spring-fed pond which would later be named White's Pond, a symbol of the impact the White family would have in the area. Tragically, Anthony died in September, 1854 in an accident at the sawmill father and son had built together. Ira's younger son, Albert, arrived from Unionville shortly after to take his brother's place. The family continued to prosper and, by 1875, owned a total of 918 acres of property in Springwater. By 1877, they had erected Springwater Grist Mills as well as two additional sawmills in the little hamlet.





This page left to right: (1) White's Pond in the 1950s was a local gathering spot for weekend fun. (2) Family of Albert White including Gordon White, the grandfather of Steelway founder Glen White. (3) Conservationist Fred White holding his pet owl. Opposite page left to right: (1) Family of Albert White in 1879. (2) Albert White.

Albert proved to be just as entrepreneurial and successful as his father. On top of running a flour mill of his own, and employing a group of men to cut down and haul large amounts of timber out of the nearby woods for cutting at the mill, Albert also owned and operated a trout farm for twenty-five years. He is remembered for pioneering the electric lighting of Springwater in the early 1920s. Electric lights were powered by the dynamo in the mill, harnessing the power of the water from the nearby pond. Bringing electric light to a small rural hamlet with a few buildings such as Springwater was rather unusual for that time. For Albert, however, it was just another show of the entrepreneurial ingenuity that seems to run in the White family's genes. Successful business ventures were something that came easily to them and the tradition would carry on in subsequent generations.

As important as Springwater was to the White family for their commercial success, there was another aspect of Springwater

that was held in even greater regard by another member of the White family—Albert's son, Fred White. A millwright by trade like his father and grandfather, Fred was better known as a nature lover and committed conservationist. Fred's life story is testament to just how deep the White family's attachment to the area had become on a personal level. It was the grounds that the White family owned that were most important to Fred. He found a deep meaning in the natural, unblemished beauty of the Springwater Carolinian Forest and made it his life's goal to preserve it in its natural state for future generations.

Fred eventually came to own the family home, the pond and the surrounding woods. Driven by the desire to share its splendour with the community, he invited scores of people to visit and enjoy the natural beauty and tranquility the property had to offer. Springwater in Fred's day was well-known as a "mecca" for naturalists, and the bush was one of the most outstanding bird

sanctuaries in the region. In an interview Fred declared: "[I don't] want to see this property destroyed in my time, and I hope it won't be after I'm gone. I've lived here all my life and managed to keep the bush as it always was, through bad times and good, while all the rest of the land around was stripped."<sup>1</sup> So strong was his desire for the forest to remain in its natural condition and for people to enjoy Springwater's nature, that the Federation of Ontario Naturalists presented a brief to the Ontario Government in 1955. The Federation asked that the bush be taken over, preserved and developed as a combined 50-acre public park and a 294-acre forest reserve. In 1963, after Fred's passing, the property including White's Pond was acquired by the Catfish Creek Conservation Authority. A testament to Fred's lasting legacy, today, the Springwater Forest is managed by the Catfish Creek Conservation Authority, offering a total of eight kilometers of trails and the large pond for nature lovers to enjoy in the heart of Carolinian Canada.

## A Dual Legacy of Family Entrepreneurship and Community

Fred and his father Albert White represent what can be described as the dual priorities of the White family. These are the importance of making smart business decisions and the ability to nurture and grow an enterprise that not only benefits the family, but the community as a whole. The family is motivated by its deep-seated love of Springwater and a willingness to share the family fortunes with the community. When combined, these two elements create a potent combination of successful entrepreneurship and a deep rootedness in the community that speaks volumes to the heritage and ongoing legacy of the White family. It was those same guiding principles operating in tandem that would define the life trajectory of the founder of Steelway, Glen White.



Top left to right: (1) Charles "Chuck" White. (2) Glen White as a baby with his parents, Elva and Chuck. Bottom left to right: (1) Glen as a baby. (2) Glen sledding with his cousin Albert White. Opposite page: Glen on the play house he, his brother Fred, and their cousins built as children.



## Glen White

Glen was born on September 14, 1945 to parents Charles Ira "Chuck" White and Elva Mae White (née Williams). Chuck's father, Gord White was the son of Albert and the brother of Fred White. Glen and his younger brother, Charles Frederick "Fred" White (born February 18, 1949), grew up on the family farm in Springwater and spent most of their lives in the area. Like most local farmers, Chuck and Elva grew produce such as melons, squash, potatoes and peas. These were popular crops particularly during the war years when there was high demand for farmers to produce as much food as possible to support the war effort. In the post-war years, many farmers in Elgin and Norfolk Counties, including the Whites, switched over from food crops to tobacco farming. This trend would change the economic foundations of the area for decades to come. The production of flue-cured tobacco in Elgin County had started on some area farms as early as in the mid-1920s and was further spurred by many new immigrants arriving in the area after the end of the Second World War to farm tobacco. As tobacco was quickly becoming a more lucrative investment for farmers due to its higher market value, Glen and Fred grew up in the heart of what is usually referred to as the "Ontario tobacco belt."

One of the key factors that prompted farmers like the Whites to become tobacco farmers was the presence of an Imperial Leaf Tobacco Company processing plant in the nearby town of Aylmer, the local centre for the surrounding farmlands of Elgin County. Opened within months of Glen's birth, the Aylmer plant was the largest of its kind in the British Empire, and very quickly became a hub of economic activity until its closure in 2007. Close proximity to a great number of tobacco farms and easy access to both the railway and the highway worked together in making Aylmer and the nearby Springwater farming community a key centre for the tobacco trade in southwestern Ontario.

## Growing Up on the Family Farm

Raised by loving and caring parents, Glen and Fred grew up in a farming community that emphasized the virtue of a hard day's work. From early on, they helped their parents on the farm and Glen, in particular, developed a deep love for working the land. Fred, though he did not quite share his older brother's passion for farming, would diligently tend to his duties on the farm. By all accounts, the two brothers were shaped by the farm and the agricultural environment they grew up in and helped out wherever they could.



Left to Right: (1) Pat White and her brother Mike Wells as children. (2) Gordon White.

As typical farm boys, Glen and Fred enjoyed a lot of freedom and independence while growing up. Once chores were done, they spent their days roaming in the woods and were often not seen for hours. During these formative years, the boys spent a lot of time with their cousins. Their cousin Albert White vividly remembers the days when they would take off to explore the countryside together. Ken White, whose father was first cousin to Glen's father Chuck, spent a lot of time with them as well. The boys would often head over to Ken's house, then walk to the dam and wander around, completely unsupervised. Although in striking contrast to children's upbringing today, the level of independence the boys enjoyed was part of growing up in a farming community in those days.

Sometimes, Glen and Fred's father Chuck would entertain the children by making use of the tractor as well as tools and

materials that were readily available on the farm. During the winter season, Chuck would take a large wooden four-by-four and attach it to the draw bar of his tractor. Then, he would take toboggans and tie them to the wooden bar so that the kids—Glen, Fred, their cousins, and often some neighbourhood friends as well—could ride them while Chuck drove the tractor around in circles in the field for hours. Somehow Chuck always managed to drive over the field without getting stuck and destroying the dormant crop underneath. Mike Wells, a childhood friend at the time who later became Glen's brother-in-law, was one of those boys. He has fond memories of the times when he and his sister Pat, Glen's future wife, went along on these wild rides: "We would fall off and try to push each other off," he says with a laugh. "There could be six or eight of us out there at once. It was a great old time. Not a lot of people would do that for a bunch of kids, but Chuck would."

## Meeting Pat

While Glen's family had strong ties to Springwater, having been an integral part of the community for several generations, Pat's family had moved to the area when she was a child. Pat, who was born in May of 1945, was six years old when her parents, Eleanor and Hubert Wells, moved the family to Aylmer from Leamington, Ontario. Hubert was a buyer with Imperial Leaf Tobacco and his family's move had been prompted by his transfer to the company's Aylmer location.

Prior to the establishment of the Ontario Flue-Cured Tobacco Growers' Marketing Board and the auction exchange in 1957, it was common practice for tobacco buyers like Hubert Wells to go out to the farms in the area and purchase tobacco directly from the farmers. It was during one of those early visits to Springwater that Hubert Wells had first met Glen's grandfather, Gord White. It did not take long for the Wells and the Whites to become close friends.

As a result of their parents' friendship, Glen and Pat met as children. She was present when Chuck would drive the kids around the field on their toboggans, and there were other times when she and her brother Mike would go tobogganing with Glen and Fred. On other occasions, Gord would take Pat and Mike and their parents on hikes through the woods and show them the places where members of the First Nations in the area had built encampments prior to European settlement. Pat further remembers her and the other children using the diving board to leap into the water while the White and the Wells families would enjoy picnics by the pond on the family farm.

## High School

From his earliest childhood days, Glen's true passion was working with his hands. He loved to build things and if it could be put together, crafted, or formulated, it immediately drew his attention. Anything that could be tinkered with or built from the ground up was Glen's lifeblood. As a result, as a student, the only class that he truly enjoyed was shop where the students were taught some basic mechanics and trades. Glen wasn't exactly what might classify as a "favoured student." He did well enough, but his mind often wandered during lessons. Teachers noted that he was day dreaming, staring out the window while letting the cogs in his head turn, designing and developing things in his mind to build.

It probably didn't help that Glen was a rather infamous troublemaker. While never malicious, he could be rather mischievous while at school. One time, Glen hooked up the school's water line to the gas line in the chemistry lab and filled up the gas system with water. Glen had no qualms about pulling pranks on the teachers at his school, either. Glen's chemistry teacher lived on a farm some distance north from the Whites' house. One year at Halloween, Glen took his father's truck and, along with a few friends, went up to their teacher's home to play a prank. Before they could do anything, their plan was foiled. The teacher and his son were prepared for them, and while Glen and his friends were distracted, scooped manure into the back of Chuck's pickup truck, forcing Glen to wash it down before coming home.

Perhaps Glen's greatest prank was the one he pulled on the vice-principal of his high school. Glen had taken up photography and developed the pictures he took in the school lab. Against this background, it only made sense that he would be in charge of taking pictures for the year book. One day he approached the vice-principal in his office and tricked him into letting him take a picture of him with his eyes closed and his head leaning back while sitting at his desk. What the vice-principal didn't know until his picture appeared in the year book was that Glen and his friends had quietly placed a bunch of cases of beer on his desk to make the picture look more interesting. Glen could get away with these kinds of pranks as he was known by his teachers as someone with a deep sense of humour who simply wanted to make the world around him a little more fun.

The single room Springwater public school Glen attended.



Glen White  
Grade 5

Glen White  
Grade 7

Glen White  
Grade 13



## A Life-Long Passion for Building

If Glen was able to be himself during shop class and find a place to explore something that he deeply loved, it was when building his own things and executing his own designs that he was truly able to express himself. Throughout his entire life, he was nothing short of determined to see the things in his mind come to life.

His passion for designing and building things drove Glen to such an extent that his idea of a fun time was what others would perceive as work. When Glen was 14 years old, he took the money he had saved from working on the farm and bought a Lincoln Idealarc 180 welder. He immediately incorporated it into a little shop that he had set up in part of his parents' garage and began doing repair work on machinery and other items used on the farm. His motivation was simply that it was something that he enjoyed doing. Little did he know at the time that this, his first piece of equipment, would be a key stepping stone to a life-long career in building.

During the winter months, Glen found himself with plenty of time to fiddle around in his little shop after school. There was always a three to four-month period after the harvest in which tobacco farmers didn't have to work as hard to tend to the farm. Glen would take advantage of this fact and get to work on his own projects. These included building his own welding bench, a pedestal grinder, a wood lathe, and various farm trailers. As Rob Collins, who started helping on the farm as a teenager and today serves as Steelway's Vice President Purchasing, explains: "Glen was always either thinking of something to build or actually building something

during that period. He always wanted to build something new." It was in his shop that the future entrepreneur would let his imagination soar, and find himself doing what he truly loved to do.

One of Glen's many creations as a teenager was what Pat describes as "a precursor to a Sea-Doo." Glen and a friend effectively designed a platform with a motor on it that a person could stand on. It had a steering mechanism in the front that came straight up, sort of like a Segway. "I remember one time, they took me down to Port Bruce and they were experimenting with this thing. It was not particularly successful and did not hold their interest for long," Pat reflects.

Glen's ability to design and build virtually anything that he was determined to create came in handy when he decided that he was tired of sharing a room with his brother, Fred. Without informing his parents, Glen built himself a bed and a bedside table out of wrought iron. At first, Elva and Chuck were upset that he had not asked for their permission, but they eventually realized that there was perhaps some wisdom in Glen's action. They ended up allowing their son to convert a room on the main level of the house into a bedroom and Glen proudly moved into his new space, together with his self-made furniture.

## A Partnership for Life

As close as the White and the Wells families were, it was Glen and Pat who would grow to become the closest of them all. In 1962, when Pat was 17 years old, her parents sent her to Switzerland to improve

her French, which, by her own account, was lacking at the time. A couple from Toronto, both of them French teachers, accompanied the group of students on the trip. The group divided their time between touring the country and learning French in a classroom setting. Pat had mixed feelings during the trip. Even though she loved the countryside, she felt out of place. "I liked the trip, but was uncomfortable at the same time," she remembers.

Pat's solace was keeping in contact with her friends back home—notably, Glen. Over the course of that summer, she sent him several postcards from Switzerland as a way of letting him know that she was thinking about him. When she returned in the fall, she soon found herself going out with Glen on what their oldest son, Jason, jokingly refers to as "their first date," a moniker that Pat doesn't think quite applies.

One day after school while they were both in grade 12, Glen asked Pat if she wanted to go for a walk in the woods. Glen had taken his father's car to school that day and drove Pat home so that she could get permission from her mother first. Eleanor said "yes," and so the two of them returned to Glen's place and proceeded to take a walk through the woods. It was a crisp fall day and after a while the cold

started to bother Pat. Glen, being the bright young gentleman that he was, gave Pat one of his gloves so that each of them had one of their hands covered. As for the exposed hands, they ended up holding them to keep them warm during the rest of the walk.

When they returned to Glen's house, Chuck had left with the car, leaving Glen no choice but to take Pat home in the old, rundown pickup truck that was used around the farm. Glen's aunt and grandmother spotted them as they were pulling out of the driveway. His aunt immediately called his mother and demanded to know how she could let Glen take Pat home in that old truck. "Eleanor will be so embarrassed! You better call her and explain why Glen and Pat will be arriving in that eye sore!" she said. Glen's mother ended up calling Pat's mother, who thought the whole situation was simply comical.

Pat may not call this a first date, at least not wholeheartedly, but nevertheless, the event put into motion the next step in Pat and Glen's evolving relationship. They would continue to see each other from this point on until getting married in 1968.

## Post-Secondary Education

Glen, in 1965, graduated from East Elgin Secondary School in Aylmer after upgrading his marks by completing a second year of grade 13. Pat had graduated a year earlier and had considered pursuing a post-secondary education in accounting, as she was always good at math and enjoyed working with numbers. Her father arranged a meeting with an accountant in Aylmer so that Pat could get a better understanding of what life as an accountant looked like. Confirmed in her choice of direction, she applied to the University of Western Ontario

in London and was accepted. The high school had arranged for a one-day tour of the university in the spring of Grade 13. Pat went on the tour and during the course of the day decided that she did not want to attend that university. "I came home that night from campus and was talking to Glen on the phone. He asked me how my day went and I said, 'well, I made a decision. There is no way I am going to Western.'"

Looking for an alternative path, Pat talked to some of her friends who had been accepted into the home economics program at the MacDonald Institute of the University of Guelph. In addition to accounting, Pat had an affinity for things like sewing and cooking and thought that program would suit her interests well. She applied at the last minute and got accepted. Four years later, in 1968, she graduated from the honours program with a Bachelor's Degree in Household Sciences.

At the same time that Pat started her studies at the MacDonald Institute, Glen was weighing his options for his own post-secondary future as well. After finishing high school, he had several discussions with his parents as to what he wanted to do with his life. His mother, Elva, remembers that Glen always had a deep desire to follow in his parents' footsteps: "He always wanted to farm and when it came time to make the decision as to whether he would go on from high school or not I knew he would have liked to farm but I said, 'get some schooling first.'" It was largely due to his mother's prompting that Glen decided to pursue a post-secondary education first before eventually taking over the family farm.

Given his passion for mechanics, there was no question for Glen as to what he should study. In 1965, he enrolled in the Mechanical Technology program at the

Western Ontario Institute of Technology in Windsor. This provided the opportunity to marry his love for mechanics and his passion for building things with a formal education. Glen later revealed in a letter to Pat that what he really wanted to do was to go to the University of Waterloo and study engineering. Recognizing that he did not have the marks to get in, the Mechanical Technology program at the Western Ontario Institute of Technology in Windsor allowed him to get as close as possible to that goal and to set himself on a path that would allow him to realize his dreams.

The courses he took during the two-year program included Materials and Machines, Manufacturing Processes, Machine and Tool Design, Industrial Relations, Thermodynamics, Metallurgy, Electrical Machines, as well as Mechanics of Machines. After a rewarding two years, Glen graduated with a diploma in Mechanical Technology in 1967 and had laid the foundations for becoming an entrepreneur and starting his own business only a few years later.



## Becoming Engaged

While Pat and Glen were studying at different schools, Pat would occasionally take the train from Guelph to Windsor to visit him. During these visits she regularly stayed with her aunt in Walkerville. On one occasion in the late fall of 1966, Glen and Pat went out for supper and then for a walk along the riverside in the park at the foot of Ouelette Ave. Pat remembers: "We sat down on a bench overlooking the Detroit River and the Detroit skyline. This is when he proposed and gave me my diamond. The one thing that I remember him saying was that my eyes were sparkling like the diamonds in my ring and he hoped that they would always sparkle like that. For years after, whenever we were in downtown Windsor, he would point out that bench."



## A Difficult Decision

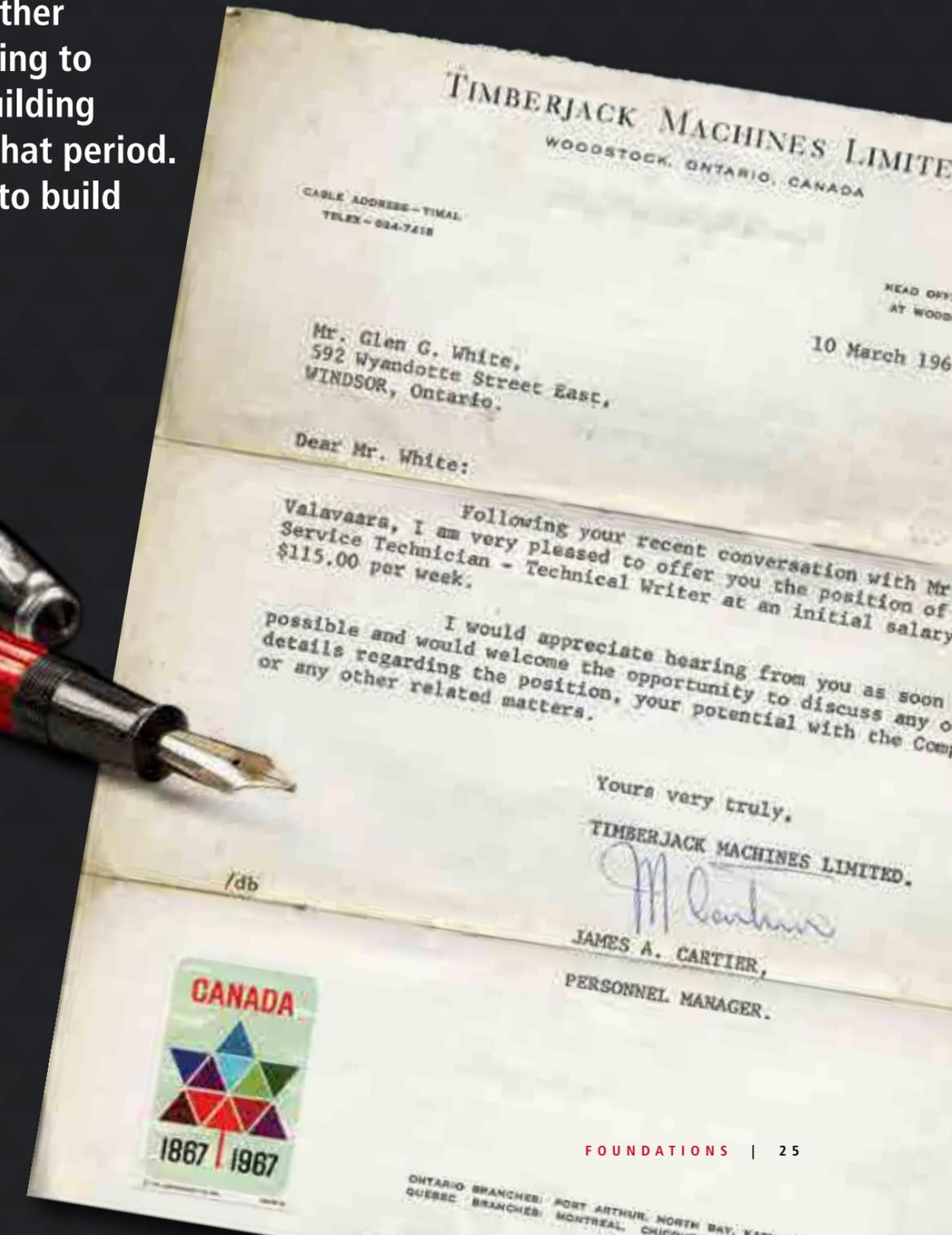
During his final year at the Western Ontario Institute of Technology, while attending a job fair at the College, Glen had a conversation with a representative of Timberjack Machines Ltd. of Woodstock, Ontario. Timberjack was growing and the recruiter told Glen that they were looking to fill an open position for a technical writer. Glen applied and in March of 1967 was offered the position with a weekly salary of \$115. It was a great opportunity to gain experience in his field of training and yet, there was a part of Glen that was causing him to have second thoughts. After all, his heart was very much still back home, on the farm. It was at that moment that he realized he wanted nothing more than return to the farm, work with his Dad, and hopefully make it his own one day.

The 1960s marked the high point of tobacco farming in Ontario's "tobacco belt." Like many other farmers, the Whites had become reasonably affluent from the economic gains that their farm produced. There was no indication yet of the challenges that Ontario tobacco farmers would be faced with in the 1980s, ultimately threatening the livelihood of many families in the area. Although the farm was doing well, there were no guarantees that Glen would be able to eventually own the farm, even if he decided to join his Dad in working the land. Despite his brother Fred's lack of interest in farming, Chuck had always told Glen that "Fred has to have the option of farming, too." As much as his father wanted Glen to work with him, he was very reluctant to give his son any sort of guarantee that he would eventually sell the farm to him. In view of the uncertainty, it took a lot of thought on Glen's part to decide what he should do. Should he take the job that he went to school for or should he go back to the farm that he already knew and loved? In what would become a defining moment in Glen's life, he turned down Timberjack and joined his father as a tobacco farmer on the family farm.

Top: Glen holding sticks of tobacco while working on the family farm.  
Bottom: Glen and his parents during his graduation from the Western Ontario Institute of Technology.

"Glen was always either thinking of something to build or actually building something during that period. He always wanted to build something new."

- Rob Collins



The letter with a job offer Glen received from Timberjack in 1967. Turning down the offer would set him on the path to founding Steelway.



Pat and Glen married on April 13, 1968.

## Getting Married and Early Life as a Family

Glen had already finished his diploma and was back working on the farm as Pat's post-secondary education was coming to an end. After four years of living in different cities and not wanting to wait any longer until they could be together, Pat and Glen were married on April 13, 1968 at the home of Glen's aunt and uncle, Pearl and Bill Eastman. Their house was directly across the road from the house that Glen was raised in and had been the home of his grandparents. The wedding took place just three days after Pat wrote her final exam.

As the young couple settled into married life, Pat accepted a job as a reference librarian at the St. Thomas Public Library and held that position for the next four years. At the same time, Glen continued to work on the farm as a share grower for his Dad until Glen and Pat were eventually able to purchase the farm. Pat remembers: "His Dad agreed to sell half the farm but then backed out of the agreement, creating a lot of frustration." In 1972, Pat and Glen purchased 2.1 acres to build a house on. In 1975, they eventually bought the first half of the farm and in 1983, finally the other half. "It took quite a while to pay off the two mortgages," she reflects. In addition to working the fields, Glen custom sprayed tobacco for an average of 12 customers from 1969 until 1974, using a sprayer he had purchased in December of 1968.

Operating the farm as a private enterprise was, in many ways, the first step leading to the eventual creation of Steelway. It was a chance for Glen to finally be in complete control of his life. The satisfaction he got out of working for himself was not lost on the people around him, either, as Rob

Collins emphasizes: "He very much wanted to run his own business. When he took over the farm from his Dad, he was very strong about 'it is mine now.' He wanted to be in control of his destiny...he was part of the farming industry, he saw the farming industry as where he could make money and be his own boss."

The fact that his parents did not live on the farm but across the road from it, allowed Glen to operate the farm as a business without having to purchase the family home. The setup was ideal as it allowed Glen to merge his passion for farming with the freedom of being his own boss, which gave him the sense of independence that was so important to him.

After getting married, Glen and Pat lived in a house trailer behind his parents' house on the White's property at first. It was Glen's way of being close to the farm and saving up money for Pat and him to eventually build their own home. When, in 1972, Glen's father had agreed to sell the building lot to them, they had saved enough money to start construction. A testament to their frugality, Glen and Pat decided to build the home themselves. Pat left her job at the St. Thomas Library in April to help Glen with both operating the farm and building the house. She recalls hammering down plywood subfloor after working in the fields all day. Looking after the farm and doing construction at the same time was challenging, particularly because that same year the crop suffered from a late spring frost, requiring Glen and Pat to replant over half of the tobacco in order to turn a profit that season. In spite of these challenges, they managed to finish the building and moved in as planned—along with wrought iron tables and a sofa Glen had built prior to their marriage. Two years

later, in 1974, he built a workshop behind the new house—a combination of a metal fabrication and wood shop. That workshop was the very first steel building Glen ever designed and fabricated himself.

In line with her earlier interests, Pat had started to look after the farm books from the time she and Glen had gotten married. When Glen started to branch out into other businesses, they realized that the financial portion of the operation was going to take more knowledge of accounting on her part. She subsequently enrolled in a night class at Fanshawe College in St. Thomas in the fall of 1974 where she learned the intricacies of accounting. In January of 1975, Glen and Pat's first child, Jason, was born. It was a time of change for the White family as Glen, Pat, and baby Jason would embark on what would become a period of laying the foundations for ongoing successful family entrepreneurship.





DAWN AND EVOLUTION OF  
GLEN WHITE INDUSTRIES

02

## The Village Blacksmith

With the house completed, the young family moved in. After the tobacco was harvested, cured and taken to the warehouse, Glen found himself with some extra time to tinker in his new workshop and build things for fun during the winter. "I was bored very quickly," Glen later reflected on becoming an entrepreneur as a way to fill idle farm winters. To keep himself busy, Glen continued to work in his shop, spending as much of his free time there as he could, balancing a life of farming with his passion for building. Going back to the wrought iron bed frame he had built as a teen, Glen decided to make fancier objects out of that material, such as candleholders, decorative cases, flowerpots, ornamental wall hangings and the like, and started selling them locally.

Albert White, reflecting on this period in Glen's life, is convinced that this was the moment when Glen's entrepreneurial spirit truly manifested itself. It was while exploring the capacity of his abilities as a craftsman that Glen really began to think about ways to use his skills to his advantage. As well, Albert was laid off from his job at that time and he feels that this event had a profound effect on Glen's growing desire to control his own destiny. Whatever the motivators were, something clicked in Glen's head and he decided to become more deliberate about his wrought iron creations and, as a result, the Village Blacksmith was born in 1975.

The business was a joint effort between Glen and Pat from the beginning. To keep advertising costs to a minimum, they took photographs of the work Glen had created and put together a little brochure for advertising in the local area. The brochure emphasized that "products are handcrafted in Springwater, Ontario," and "designed and created by using the best of material, the greatest of care, and are guaranteed to be of the highest quality." Glen and Pat ended up selling a few pieces, but overall the endeavor did not pan out the way Glen had hoped, and his first foray into small scale entrepreneurship floundered.

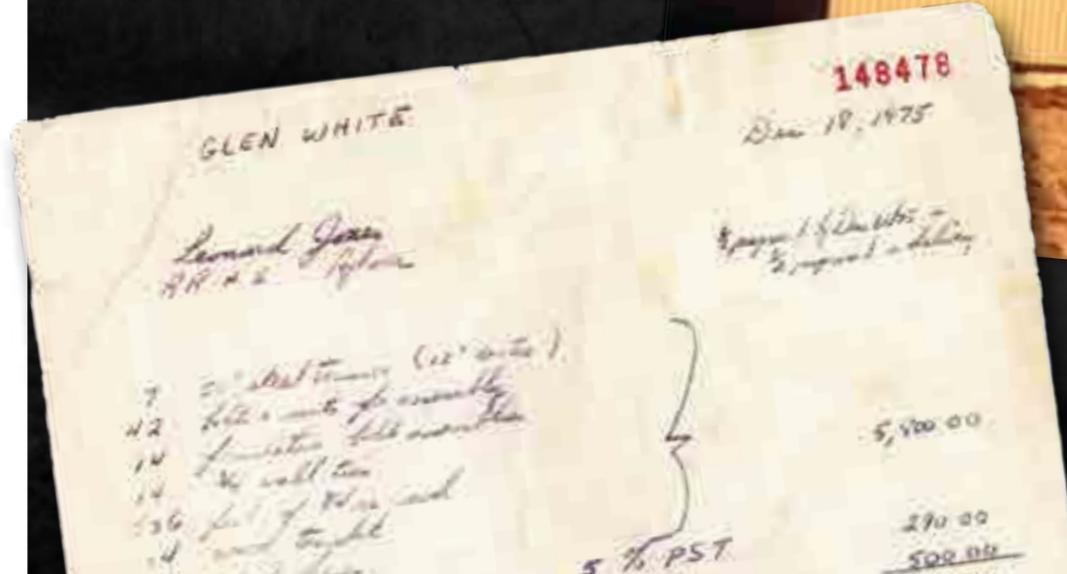
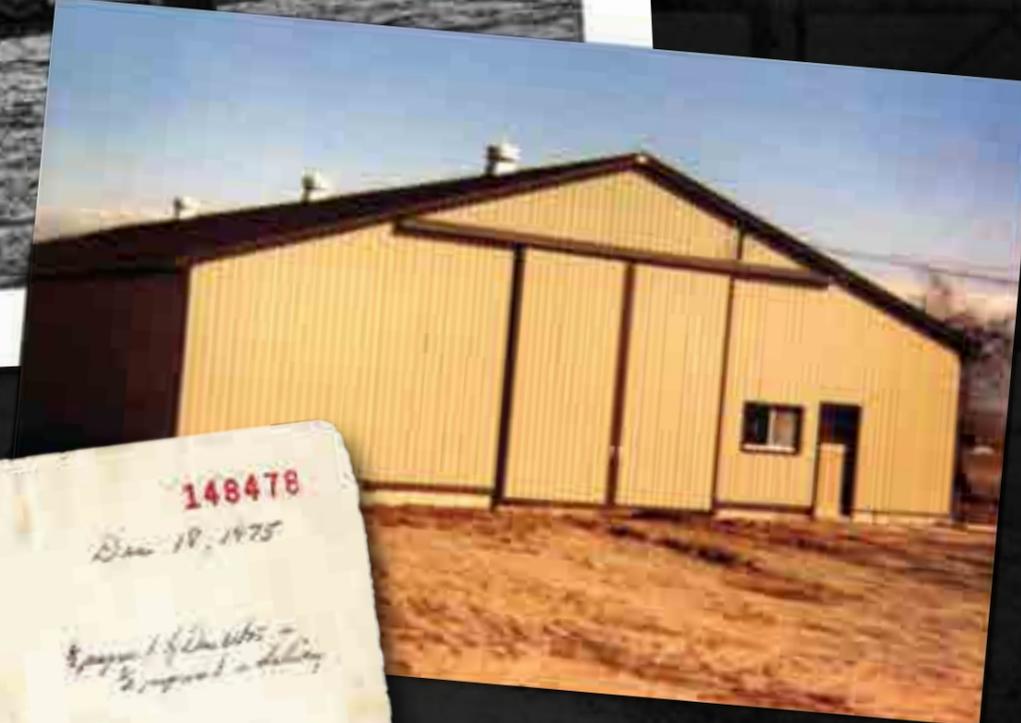
As much as Glen loved designing and building the different pieces, it was just a simple side operation that was in no way intended to compete with his full-time commitment to the farm. Being aware of his priorities, it was easy for Glen to eventually abandon the idea after realizing that it wasn't worth the effort from a business perspective.



## The First Barn—Laying the Foundations for Steelway

In April 1975, the farm was in need of a new pack barn. Being the handyman that he was, Glen decided to build it himself. He hired a few young guys that he knew, including Rob Collins who had started working part-time on the farm in 1970 already, to help with the build. Rob recalls just how big of a job it was with Glen laying everything out by hand and doing as much as he could by himself. "I don't even think he had a saw when he did his first building!" Rob exclaims with a laugh. To lift the frames Glen rented a crane and when the building was up it looked like a professional job. In fact, the barn was built so well that it quickly attracted the attention of some of Glen's neighbours. Without knowing it, in building that barn Glen had laid the foundations for Steelway Building Systems.

One of Glen's neighbours, a good friend of his from high school, Leonard Jones, would soon put Glen on a path that would change his life forever. Leonard, who had just inherited his own tobacco farm from his father, needed a new pack barn for the crop. He was so impressed with the barn Glen had built on his own property that he asked Glen to build a similar barn for him. Glen leapt at the opportunity, and in the fall of 1975, sold what would be the first of many buildings, a 50 foot by 112 foot by 10 foot wood/steel tobacco barn, to Leonard at a price \$6,590 after tax.



What started as a favour for a friend quickly became a real business opportunity for Glen. Building a barn wasn't a chore for Glen as it allowed him to live out his natural creativity and passion for working with his hands. It was something that gave him purpose and drive. If it meant a means of making some extra money during the offseason when there was little to do on the farm—all the better! Many years later, Glen laid out his unique understanding of "work" in a conversation with Jim Urquhart, a fellow member of the Canadian Sheet Steel Building Institute. Dismissing the idea that he needed to take a vacation from work, Glen said, "You know Jim, you don't understand. Lots of people grow up wanting to be a baseball player, a hockey player or a singer. I always grew up wanting to build stuff. I have never worked a day in my life because I have been doing what I want to do since I was six years old. So, don't worry about me not shutting it down."

### The Founding of Glen White Industries

During the year of 1976, Glen continued to toy with the idea of establishing a business for himself. Though he had built the barn for Leonard Jones, in Glen's mind this was still very much a one-off thing, and he didn't quite see himself erecting buildings for the local farmers as a permanent means of making money. However, Glen decided to capitalize on a recent development in the tobacco industry—the evolution of what was called the elephant wagon.

Part of the process of farming tobacco was picking the tobacco leaves, tying them to wooden slats and hanging the slats in the kilns for five or six days to cure. Curing and the subsequent aging was a necessary

process to allow for the slow oxidation and degradation of carotenoids in the tobacco leaf. After the tobacco was cured, it had to be taken out of the kiln and moved into the pack barn. Transferring the sticks of tobacco leaves from the tobacco kiln to the pack barn was a labour intensive process that usually required three people, as Pat remembers: "One person would be on the wagon, someone else would have to be just inside the door of the kiln to transfer the tobacco from one person to another and a third person would be up in the kiln standing on the hangers handing the sticks of tobacco down. That was always a nuisance to get three people moving."

To make this process easier, tobacco farmers started using larger wagons called elephant wagons instead of the traditional flat farm wagons when moving the tobacco. In a first step, Glen had come up with the idea of using a tarp rigged to two long boards to create a slide between the hangers at the top of the kiln and the wagon. That way instead of having a person at the door handling the tobacco sticks, they could just slide down to the person piling the tobacco on the wagon. To prevent piles of tobacco from tipping over on the wagon, he created his own version of the elephant wagon. "He made this long wagon with sides and a back to it to support the piles of tobacco so that the two of us did not have to rely on anybody else when taking the tobacco out of the kiln," Pat remembers.

The business opportunity for Glen was in the fact that to truly benefit from using an elephant wagon, farmers needed to have a forklift for removing the pallets with tobacco which were set in each half of the elephant wagon. Since not every farmer had a forklift, Glen came up with the idea to design and build a forklift mast that could hook onto any three-point hitch tractor, which every farmer did have. The invention would allow farmers to move the pallets of tobacco off the elephant wagon and into the pack barn much more easily. It was a concept as simple as it was genius.

Seeing the business potential in making these masts, Glen purchased enough material to build 80 units and advertised them for sale. "Time is money—save time, save money. We can help you do both," was the key benefit to farmers emphasized in advertisements placed in industry publications such as *Western Ontario Farmer*, *Tobacco Grower* and *Canadian Tobacco Grower*. The forklift masts became popular enough for Glen to keep advertising and selling them until as late as 1979. By that time, he felt it was time to specialize and decided to focus exclusively on manufacturing buildings.

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 AYLMER, ONTARIO  
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AT LONDON, ONTARIO APRIL 5, 1976.  
 [for] REGIONAL DIRECTOR - DIRECTEUR RÉGIONAL

To Glen's surprise, the story of Leonard's barn had reached far and wide among other tobacco farmers in the area. Something must have resonated with other members of the community, because Glen fell into a bit of a windfall. Suddenly, everybody seemed to want a new pack barn. As a result, in 1976 Glen sold and built three more pack barns and by the following year, he had three employees working for him on a part-time basis. As word of the quality of Glen's work traveled around the tobacco area by word of mouth, more and more people approached him to build barns for them as well. Tobacco farmers were doing well at the time and there was lots of opportunity in the local agricultural market for Glen to tap into.

According to Pat, part of the early success of Glen's business was the fact that many of the farmers in the tobacco area had come from Europe, mainly from the Netherlands and Belgium. These immigrant farmers all lived near each other, and through similarly

shared experiences, bonded together as a closely connected ethnic community. When these immigrant farmers approached Glen to build barns for them, there was a sort of a friendly competitive drive among them, prompting them to ask for bigger and bigger buildings as a means of staying one step ahead of each other. It kept pushing Glen to figure out a way to keep engineering larger buildings with wider spans. "The fact that they were competitive helped us grow in those days," Pat explains. "It was like, 'my friend has a 30 foot building, let's make ours 40 feet.'"

To make the enterprise official, Glen registered his business under the name G. White Industries in 1976. On April 5, 1976, a sales tax licence was made out for the purpose of "Steel Building Trusses & Equipment [Fork Lifts]." The company name was changed to Glen White Industries Ltd. when it was officially incorporated in April of 1978.





The Steelway plant in Springwater under construction in 1978.

Things started to change quickly as word began to spread about the work that Glen White Industries was doing. To satisfy the growing demand, Glen and his small group of employees began making buildings ahead of time for customers during the winter months. "Sometimes in the spring we would have up to 10 buildings piled up in the yard. There were no blueprints but we knew how to cut the rafter and beams and Roy Phillips, who was a great welder, would weld the critical parts together," Bryan Hernandez remembers.

Everyone involved with the small company was surprised by how quickly the business was developing. To support this growth, Pat did everything she could to pitch in and help. Working out of an unfinished room in their house that eventually became the dining room, she managed the finances of the small family enterprise. She remembers being constantly on the move, calling in orders to companies for materials that Glen needed, or taking trips to London to pick up supplies, all while raising Jason.

In 1978, Glen and Pat's second child, Bryan, was born, and he would soon find himself going on drives with Pat and his older brother as well. Glen could not have asked for a more supportive partner while turning his entrepreneurial dream into reality. In looking after different parts of the family business, Glen and Pat made a great team. Pat making sure that Glen White Industries operated smoothly on the administrative side allowed Glen to focus on production and getting things done for his customers.

Within two years of founding the company, Glen White Industries outgrew its original manufacturing space. As a result, in 1978, Glen purchased additional property from the Taelman family in Springwater and began the first phase of construction on what is the current Steelway plant—a 15,000 square foot facility with an overhead crane system. This first major capital investment into the company, while necessary for the business, was not entirely met with open arms by everybody close to Glen and Pat. Glen faced considerable resistance to the idea mainly from his father who felt that

making such a huge investment outside of the tobacco side of the family operation was a mistake. Less of a risk taker than his son, Chuck did not understand why Glen would invest into a separate business rather than just tending to the farm. To him, farming was secure and solid whereas the sort of thing his son was doing posed a substantial risk. Glen listened to his father's objections but was not deterred.

The company moved into the new building in November of 1978, in spite of the fact that the heating wasn't finished yet. The new facility allowed Glen to put more emphasis on the use of steel in the buildings he produced as well as designing buildings for agricultural uses other than barns, such as greenhouses. The tax licence was updated to accommodate this broader direction the company would be taking in the future. When issued in April of 1978, it defined the focus of the business more broadly as "steel building trusses and agricultural implements." Reflecting the popularity of its products, Glen White Industries employed 15 people by the end of 1978.

The Springwater plant completed in 1979.



Drafting tables used in the 1970s. Inside view of the production area in the 1970s.



## Glen as an Entrepreneur & Leader

Glen White Industries in the late 1970s was a small, yet ambitious family business run by a driven entrepreneur with a vision for the future. "Glen, back then, always had a spring in his step and never stopped for a moment. He was that type of energetic guy," remembers builder Al Reid. Long-time employees share memories of Glen during these early days as someone with high expectations of his employees, who was a great teacher and mentor but was also someone who easily lost his temper.

Bryan Hernandez will never forget his first day on the job. Bryan was using the shear to cut metal plates that were supposed to end up being 19 inches long. To cut the plates the right length, he needed to measure the plates. New on the job, he failed to realize that the tape measure he was using had an inch cut off in the machine. As a result, out of all the plates he cut, only one ended up being the correct length. When Glen noticed the mistake, he called Bryan over and calmly told him, "Well, it probably wasn't the best day for you here. You've got to be a little more careful."



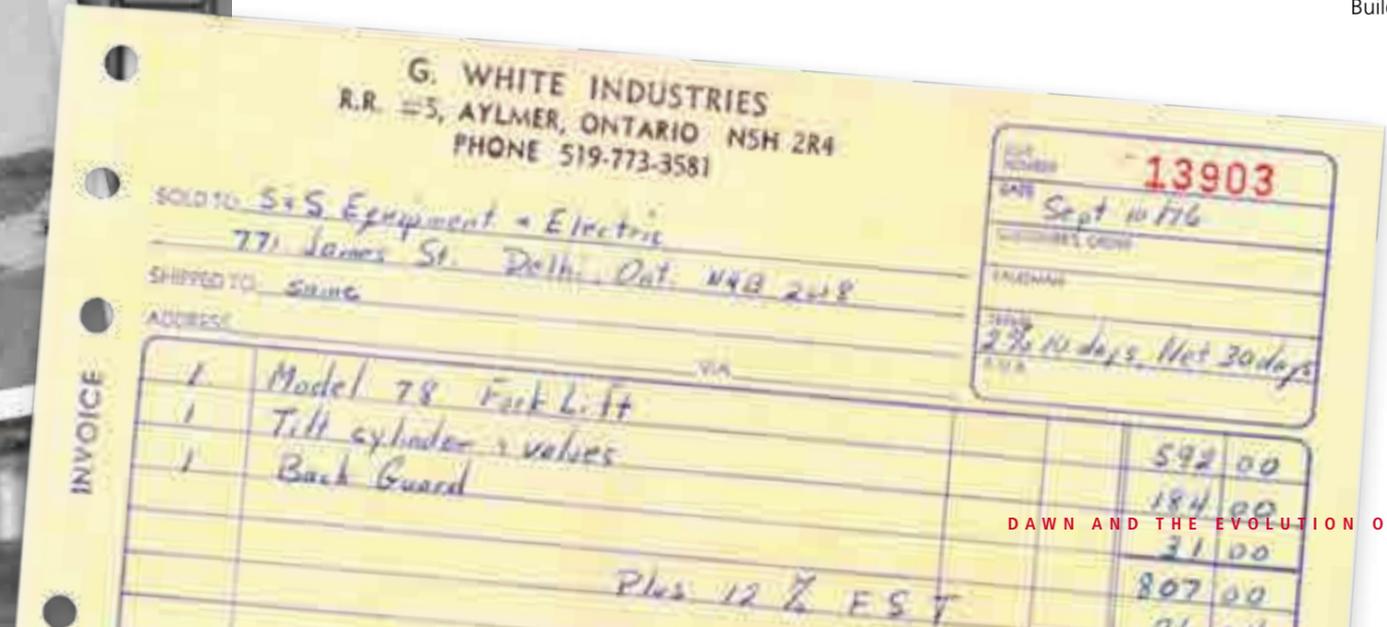
Rob Collins experienced the other side of Glen, one that was rougher and quicker to anger, largely due to his nature of wanting to do things right the first time and to prevent unnecessary waste of material. One day early on in his career at Glen White Industries he set up the iron worker in the shop to punch out baseplates. To ensure that the plates would end up with a standard hole pattern, the operator needed to check them every so often because the machine would drift out of position. In this case, the operator whom Rob had taught how to use the machine, forgot to check the plates to ensure that they were all even. As a result, the plates had all shifted a quarter of an inch. Rob had missed the mistake because of the way that they were stacked.

When realizing the mistake, Glen was furious. "Why did you set it up that way?" he screamed as he started grabbing the plates and throwing them down on the ground. "This whole skid is wasted!" Rob promptly went into the house and told Pat to keep his paycheque to cover the cost of the plates that he was apparently responsible for ruining and went home. Glen, realizing he had made a mistake, called Rob later that day and apologized for losing his temper. Rob came back to work and has since become Steelway's longest-serving employee.

Glen's passion was a double-edged sword. It gave him drive and purpose and pushed him to do the best job that he possibly could, and yet it also meant that he was adamant about expecting employees to do things right and to elevate the quality of the work of the people around him to match his own vision. As quick as he was to anger, he was just as quick to calm down again and gather his bearings.

Brian Vernaleken, a senior checker who was hired in 1980, summarized Glen's personality as a passionate business leader: "He got mad quick but he calmed right down like nothing had happened. And that was his personality...that was how he functioned. Once you got to know that, you could accept it. You learned to deal with it."

Glen was committed to the people he employed and always took a personal interest in them. It was just as important to him that employees genuinely enjoyed what they were doing as was ensuring that the job was done correctly and with the level of quality Glen expected from himself and others. A reflection of his commitment and the value Glen placed on people, he made sure to mentor employees and show them the right way of doing things. Like any teacher, he always pushed the people around him to be the best that they could be. Jim McLain, who began his career at Glen White Industries in 1979, reflects: "Glen would always ask for you to do better, no matter what you did. There was always something that you could do to step it up a notch."



## Safety in the Old Days

Prior to the evolution of today's strict regulatory work environment with its many safety standards, processes in manufacturing and erecting buildings were much more relaxed at Glen White Industries, as they were throughout Ontario's industrial landscape at the time. Rob Collins vividly remembers the process of putting up pack barns for early customers: "I remember we were erecting a pack barn and Glen pointed at the ladder and said, 'climb up there and tighten those bolts.'" It was standard practice in those days that one member of the small crew would be up high on the ladder, tightening bolts and doing other jobs, while a second employee held the rope and swung him back and forth. "We were throwing the bolts up to these guys and sometimes we missed and the bolts fell down. Most of us had hard hats but definitely not everybody. That is just the way it was. Today, you can't even climb up that ladder without a harness and training."

## Moving Towards a Bright Future

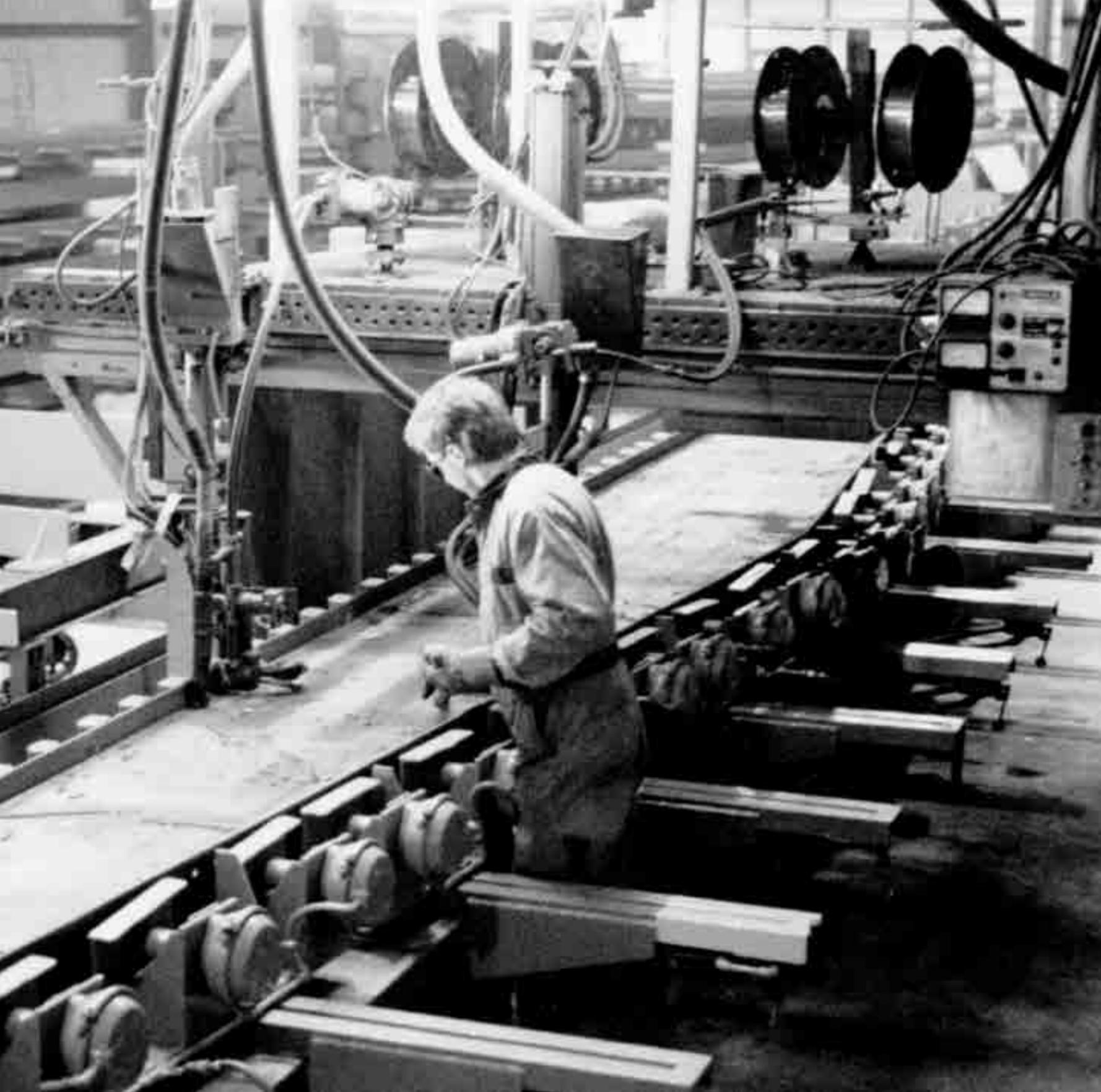
The first non-farm building designed and built by Glen White Industries was a pre-cast concrete plant in Delhi that was completed in 1978. This, the company's first foray into the commercial market prompted Glen to begin actively seeking more industrial and commercial clients to diversify the business, as farm sales were too reliant on crop prices. "We just put one foot in front of the other," Glen explained of his cautious approach to diversification in the late 1970s, pointing to the fact that at the time he knew what farmers needed but was not as familiar with the different needs of commercial customers. Serving commercial clients was much more complex as commercial buildings were subject to a range of regulations that did not apply to buildings for agricultural use.<sup>3</sup>

With the new direction established, 1979 turned out to be a particularly memorable year in the evolution of the company. Glen White Industries began using steel purlins and girts in a considerable number of its buildings for the first time. In the beginning, these were purchased from an outside

supplier. Steel purlins and girts marked a significant change to the buildings by allowing for larger bay sizes, in particular.

That same year, Glen White Industries sold 81 buildings, 13 of which were greenhouses. Advertisements using the taglines of "Glen White Industries offers you Strength in Steel!" and "Steel roof trusses Permanent and Strong" are manifestations of Glen's foundational belief in steel as the best possible material. In that, they pointed towards a future where all-steel buildings would eventually become the trademark of the company. While many of the structures sold in 1979 were tobacco barns, several of the buildings erected that year were commercial in nature, such as a Massey dealership in Tillbury. At the end of the decade, the future direction of the company as an ambitious provider of mixed steel/wood and all-steel buildings for both agricultural and industrial/commercial use was clearly visible. The hiring of the first company salesman in 1978 and Glen's brother, Fred, joining the company a year later in sales were clear indications of Glen's larger vision for the family business. The future looked bright for Glen White Industries, which from 1982 onward would operate under the name Steelway Building Systems.

This page: 1976 invoice for a three-point hitch tractor mount forklift. Opposite page: "Little Clyde" on the company truck during a building delivery in the late 1970s.



BECOMING STEELWAY

03

## Defining the Vision

If the 1980s must be considered the formative years for Steelway, it is because Glen knew exactly where he wanted to take his company and because he put the necessary steps in place to make his entrepreneurial vision a reality. While the overall goal of providing a top quality product and being the best in the industry remained the same throughout his life, he was not afraid of letting his vision evolve and grow bigger as new opportunities continued to present themselves. Rob Collins remembers Glen first outlining his vision to him during a construction project only a few years earlier, in 1978. One evening after a long day of work, Rob asked Glen, "How big are you going to take this company?" Glen smiled, got up and drew a circle in the sand. "I believe I can earn a good living selling buildings related to the farming industry like implement sheds, tobacco barns and farm equipment dealerships within a 100-mile radius of Aylmer," he replied. He pointed out that this included selling into the United States as well. A reasonable goal at the time, it would be quickly outgrown as Steelway buildings became popular beyond the radius originally envisioned by Glen.

## Airplane Hangars, Grain Storage and Commercial Buildings— Milestone Projects

An expression of the dynamic character of Glen's vision for his company and his ability to steer it in a direction that would ensure its long-term success, the 1980s marked a foundational shift in Steelway's focus. The company moved from agricultural towards industrial and commercial applications, to the effect that by the end of the decade, Steelway was almost exclusively producing buildings for industrial and commercial use. This process went hand in hand with the gradual transition of the company's product to all-steel buildings. A product brochure from the early 1980s recommended steel roof trusses for buildings for a variety of uses such as workshops, pack barns, storage for machines and grain, hog barns, warehouses, airplane hangars, swimming pool covers and commercial buildings. "Have the Strength and Permanence of Steel at a price that is competitive with all wood or culvert style buildings" was the value proposition the company made to future customers.

## Building Capacity during the Recession

The early 1980s were turbulent years, as both the U.S. and the Canadian economies went through a recession. Prompted by high inflation in the wake of the 1979 energy crisis, the recession began in the summer of 1981 and lasted until the end of 1982. In the early 1980s, there were about a dozen companies in Ontario competing with each other for customers of pre-engineered buildings, the kind Steelway was offering. By the time the recession ended, about half of them had gone out of business. Where other companies faltered, Steelway persevered. Although his business was not immune to the negative effects of the recession, Glen found a way to make the negative economic climate work to his advantage.

Competitors that were forced to shut down opened their storerooms and auctioned off valuable parts of their equipment to satisfy creditors. For Glen, bankruptcy sales meant an opportunity to procure equipment he envisioned using in the future at a low cost. Glen bringing home equipment from many auctions he attended remains one of the key memories that Rob Collins has of this particular time period: "He would go to these equipment auctions all the time and buy stuff. And then he would come back and say, 'we need a truck to go down there.' I remember seeing trailer loads of screws and bolts and thinking, 'in a million years, we're not going to use all this.'" Rob was wrong—almost everything Glen purchased was used over time. "I think the only thing that we still have left today is a skid of screws from one of those auctions!" Rob concludes with a smile.

Glen's purchases weren't limited to small bits and pieces that he bought in bulk. To him auctions were also a means to acquire heavy machinery that he could incorporate into new lines he designed and built at the plant. In 1982, he bought a gantry welder that became instrumental in the company's ability to weld its own beams in different sizes rather than purchasing preformed hotrolled beams from a supplier as had been common practice in the early days. Steelway's first gantry welder used flux-core welding machines to apply the linear welds to create a fabricated beam.

While Steelway may not have needed all of the equipment Glen purchased at auctions immediately, he was led by the conviction that it was better to keep adding capacity cheaply while the opportunity presented itself even if it meant growing into it later.

This page and opposite page: Drawing and completed project of a typical span beam frame building erected in 1983. Newspaper advertisements from the early 1980s using the combined Glen White Industries and Steelway logo.

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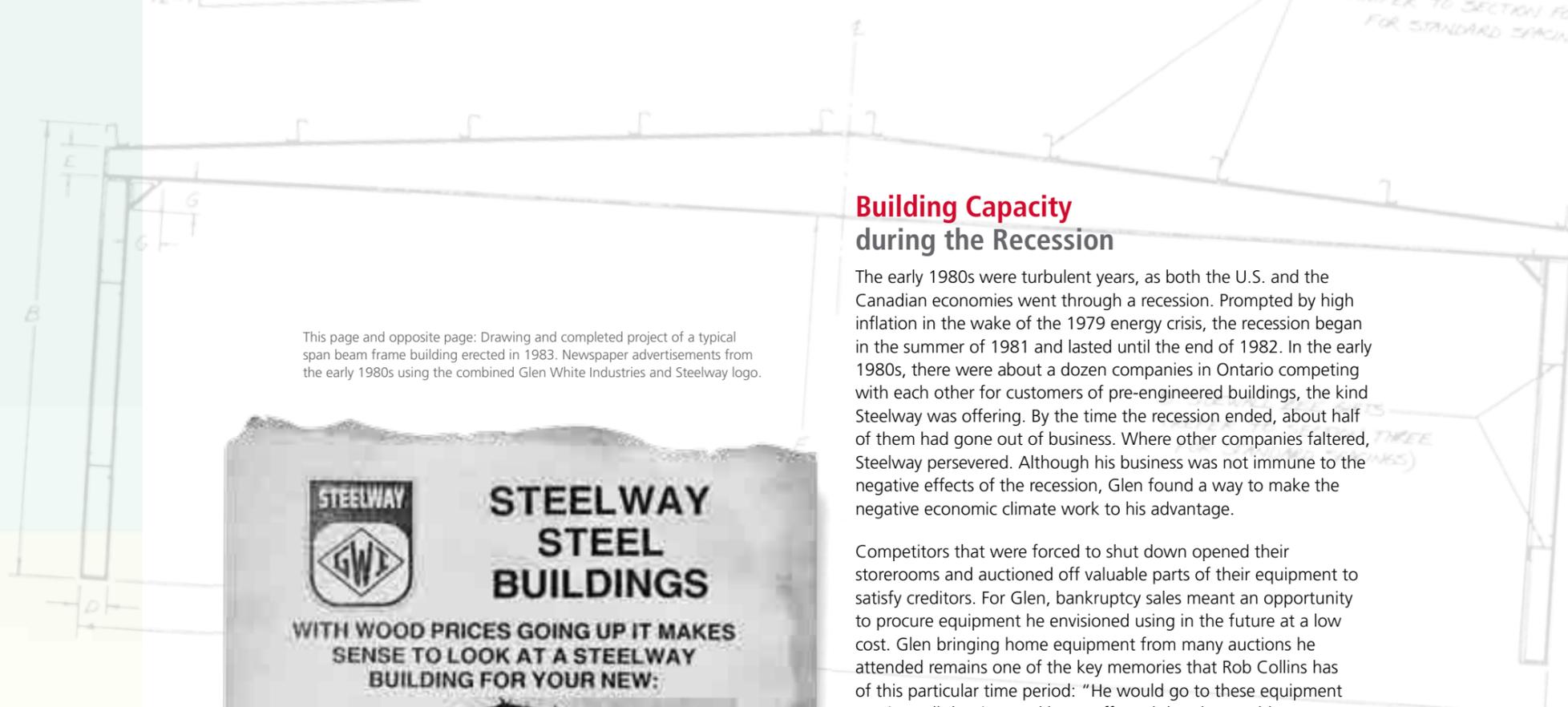
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A great example of Glen's foresight and vision was the acquisition of a second gantry welding machine that uses sub-arc welders, at another of the many auctions he attended during the recession. At first sight, the timing could not have been any more off. Glen purchased the machine almost immediately after Steelway had gotten its flux-core gantry welder up and running. The main shortcoming of the flux-core welder was that it was slow and caused bright arc flashes. Long-time employees remember getting arc flashes in their eyes from time to time when operating the equipment. Glen knew that going from flux-core to sub-arc welding would be a major improvement in addressing that issue and in creating a more efficient and higher quality weld. Looking back, the sub-arc gantry welding machine turned out to be a significant stepping stone in Steelway's ability to manufacture buildings for industrial and commercial use.

The circumstances under which Glen purchased the sub-arc gantry welding machine which everyone at Steelway simply refers to as "the sub-arc welder" is a well-known story at Steelway. When Glen got wind that yet another competitor had gone out of business, he immediately made plans to check out what kind of equipment they had. Before he left for the auction, Pat told him that he was "absolutely forbidden to

spend any money!" Glen reluctantly agreed not to make a purchase but that promise was put to the test as soon as he saw that there was a sub-arc welder up for auction. He desperately wanted it, but Pat's orders were clear to him, and the last thing that he wanted to do was ignore his wife's rather stern directive. After all, since the economy was in the midst of a recession, her concerns were valid. When the sub-arc welder was announced by the auctioneer, it took a great deal of restraint on Glen's part not to bid. The urge got even bigger when he realized that no one else was bidding on it. At this point, he thought, "what the hell?" and bid a low amount on the machine. To his great surprise, his bid, at one tenth of the retail price, was accepted, and Glen found himself the proud owner of a sub-arc welder. Immediately after the auctioneer yelled "sold," two other attendees, realizing the mistake they had made by not bidding on the machine, came up to Glen and offered double and triple the amount he had paid. Determined to take his prize home, he didn't budge. The boys back at the plant would certainly be happy with his acquisition, he thought. But it wasn't them that Glen had to sell the idea to. Rob Collins and Bryan Hernandez will never forget Glen coming back to the plant and making his instructions very clear to them: "I bought another welding line. Don't tell Pat. I have to figure out how to explain it to her."

This page: Inside view of the production area and company truck in 1984. Opposite page: Fred White's monster truck "Red Iron" that he built himself using a 1988 Chevrolet pickup body.

Bigger and more complex projects became further possible as the result of other significant investments into new machinery. A press brake for bending sheet steel was added in 1982, the same year that the sub-arc welder was acquired. A roll former that was purchased a year later gave Steelway the capability to manufacture its own purlins and girts. Other investments made into the company during the early 1980s included two brand new highway trucks equipped with Hiab cranes to allow for the deliveries of materials to job sites. Glen was particularly proud of the new trucks. For years, he had gotten by with older used models that were prone to breakdowns. The new trucks were a sign of success to him. Jason reflects: "I remember riding home with him from Toronto in the new GMC 5-star General as if it was yesterday. Dad was so proud."

## Becoming Steelway

As an entrepreneur, Glen knew that people purchase brands rather than just products. As a result, 1980 saw the birth of the Steelway brand. Registered as a trademark in 1979 already, the name "Steelway Building" was first used on an invoice dated September 18, 1980, to mould an identity that would make the buildings offered by Glen White Industries stand out in the industry. The notion conveyed by the Steelway name was that of steel buildings that are built to last. It was a bold statement that the company was transitioning to all-steel buildings and that the days when Glen White Industries had created mainly steel frames with purlins and girts made out of wood were slowly coming to an end.

Adopting the Steelway name for its buildings was only the first step in the evolution of the Steelway brand. Next was naming the business Steelway Building Systems. As Bryan Hernandez points out, the company's official name—Glen White Industries Ltd.—was widely recognized locally. Outside of that, however, Glen White Industries competed with branded companies that carried "Building Systems" in their names. Realizing that Steelway Building Systems would create a much stronger brand in the market place, Glen decided to rename the company "Steelway Building Systems—a division of Glen White Industries."

There was one more challenge that needed to be overcome first before Steelway Building Systems could become the official operating name of the business in 1982. An Ontario steel building erector was using the Steelway name as well and as both company owners stood their ground, an argument developed as to who had applied the name first. Luckily, Glen was able to find a document that showed that he had used the "Steelway" name at an earlier date.



## Fred White

Given their close relationship, it does not come as a surprise that in 1979, Glen hired his younger brother, Fred, to work for the company. Starting in sales, and later promoted to the position of district manager, Fred brought with him his own brand of positivity, high energy, and a flair that no one else could. Over the years, Fred would play an instrumental role in the company. Their mother Elva remembers Glen referring to Fred as his "best salesman" at the time.

Fred was an avid lover of cars who joined Steelway after working as a mechanic in a number of garages in St. Thomas and Aylmer. In his spare time, he built and continuously worked on a number of different vehicles ranging from a lifted four-wheel drive Honda Civic and an AMC Gremlin, to Broncos and motorcycles. One of his favourite creations that is vividly remembered by long-time Steelway employees, was a full-size monster truck he called Red Iron, named after the main structural part of Steelway buildings. Harley Venables, who joined Steelway in 1988 as a general labourer, remembers Fred bringing the monster truck to work one time, driving around in circles in the parking lot, screaming and shouting and having a good time. "You could hear him over every single piece of machinery in the plant, spinning around in that thing," he says. It was a passion that proved to be extremely useful in his professional role at Steelway. As Fred was in sales, a key aspect of his job was connecting with people. Reflecting back on his uncle, Steelway co-president Bryan White emphasizes that it was due to his love of cars that making connections with other people came easily to Fred, particularly as many people shared that sort of hobby.

Of the many stories that are told about Fred, the one that is remembered the most is him bringing his pet cougar kitten named Terra to work one day. Fred was raising the animal in a play pen outside of his house. While most people would find it rather strange to have a cougar as a pet, Fred was not "most people." One day as he walked through the door, Rob Collins noticed the sleeping cougar on the office floor. Bewildered, he went to Fred and asked, "Why is there a cougar on the floor?" Fred looked up at Rob and simply replied, "He was at the vet and I didn't want to leave him at home alone."

## Putting Steelway to the Test: The Melbourne Grain Storage Building (1982)

The largest project during the 1980s—and certainly the one that garnered the most attention for Steelway—was a one million-bushel grain storage facility in Melbourne, Ontario, in 1982. Celebrated as the largest aerated circular silo in Canada at the time, it was in many ways the building that put Steelway on the map. It was special not only because of its unique design and size, but also because Steelway successfully completed the entire project within the short timeframe of six weeks.

Working with contractor Verne Hathaway, Glen helped develop the design for a round building that was lower and wider than the traditional tall upright silo that was common on farms across Ontario. Plans were drawn up for a building that was only 70 feet high at its centre, but had a large diameter of 216 feet. The facility consisted of 32 concrete wall panels, each of them 20 feet wide by 26 feet high with an 18-foot radius, weighing 27 tonnes a piece and held in place by jack braces. The most unique feature of these panels was that they were all curved inward in order to divert most of the grain's weight to the ground, meaning the structure would remain sturdy even at a full load. Another key benefit of the design for the customer was that it was a highly cost efficient solution.

Built at a comparatively low cost of \$500,000 for a capacity of one million bushels, the building's unique design meant that the capital investment was about \$0.60 per bushel storage capacity compared to about \$1.50 per bushel capacity in a traditional upright silo design.

The design was so unconventional that it truly put Glen and Steelway to the test. "I remember already working on the building and Glen was still inventing the whole thing. We have sold this building, we have committed to a delivery date, and here is Glen still inventing in his head how we are going to get this thing done," recalls Rob Collins. There was a lot of learning on the job as materials had to be treated in unconventional ways to accommodate the unique angles of the structure. Rob, for one, did not know prior to the Melbourne project that steel angel iron could be rolled to a radius. Glen, however, did and he was eager to show everybody just what was possible with imagination, ingenuity and his typical "out-of-the-box" approach to structural design. Glen was especially intrigued with the way the roof was designed. In an interview with a newspaper he emphasized that the roof, constructed in 16 segments with a steel frame and wood purlins, was the real novelty of the project. Both plywood and hinges were used on top of this, with the plywood acting as a condensation barrier. "All of this makes a unique and efficient storage space," Glen summed up his view of Steelway's signature project at the time.<sup>4</sup>



The completion of the silo was a resounding success. Newspapers dedicated entire pages to the project and gave it such glowing praise that Steelway was sure to turn heads. Glen, however, being the down-to-earth and humble person that he was, was quick to tell reporters that it would be unfair for him to take too much credit for the accomplishment. "There have been so many people with input into this, you couldn't say the idea was any one person's because it would do a lot of discredit to many other people," he told the reporter of *The Free Press*. Instead, Glen was more interested in showing everybody the results of a hard couple of weeks of work and explaining the benefits of the rather unconventional design. "The proof of the concept will be in the pudding," he concluded.<sup>5</sup>

The Melbourne project opened a lot of eyes among Steelway employees as to what the company was truly capable of. As Terry Trudel, who joined Steelway in 1980, emphasizes, "The Melbourne grain storage sure was something. That was when we realized what we could accomplish." A bold move at the time, its resounding success was a testament to the potential of Steelway that has since expressed itself in ever more complex buildings not thought possible only years earlier. "Together, we can do anything," was a conclusion shared by everyone involved. From that moment forward, Glen's team knew that pretty much anything can be rolled into any shape or formed with the right tools and careful precision. "Those kinds of experiences were the things that fascinated me. There was so much to learn and Glen was just such a wealth of information," Rob Collins reflects. "It wasn't until you got into one of those projects that you realized how unique, creative and innovative Glen really was." Being able to execute a lofty design that was unseen prior to being drawn up and completing the building on time, within a month and a half, was a huge achievement that even Glen could hardly believe. "We were nuts to do it in such a short time period," he said. "But the challenge to build Canada's largest, aerated circular silo was too great for either partner to pass up."<sup>6</sup>



Top: The centre support tower of the Melbourne grain storage building is being loaded on the truck at the Steelway plant. Bottom: Aerial view of the Melbourne project under construction, 1982.

## Glen White & the Evolving Culture of Steelway

The evolving culture of Steelway was defined by Glen's personal values, his vision as an entrepreneur and his unique way of doing things "the Glen White way." A defining element of Glen's philosophy that is remembered by many long-time employees was his willingness to trust people in whom he saw potential. This is reflected in the hiring practices he employed and in his willingness to delegate some of his responsibilities to employees as the company got larger and his role changed from "being the firefighter constantly confronted with problems needing immediate solutions" to directing a medium-size business, as he reflected in 1987.<sup>7</sup>

It was not uncommon for Glen to interview a job applicant for a few minutes and take on talent almost immediately once he decided he liked what the candidate had to offer. Jim McLain, who joined Steelway

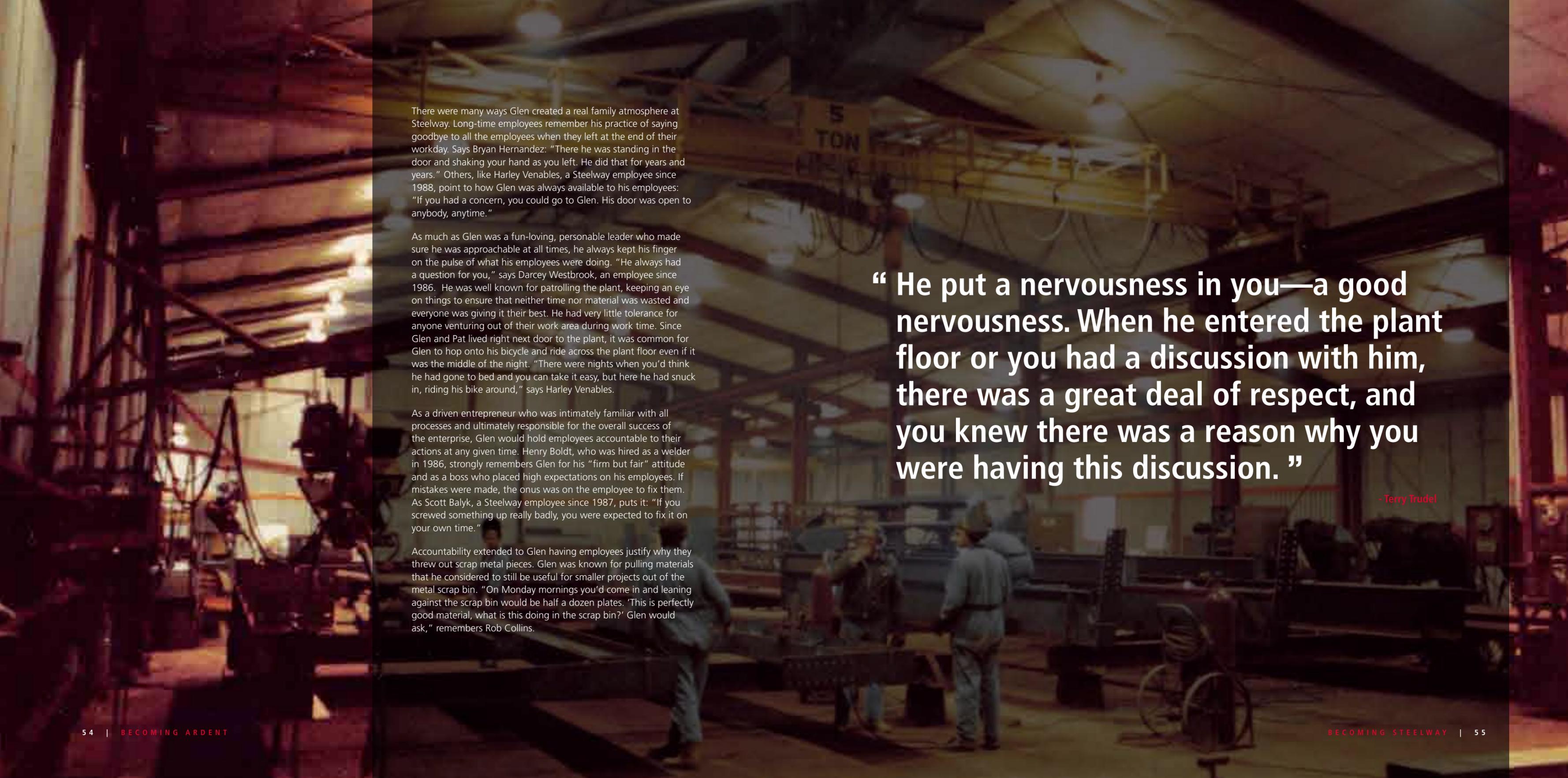
in August of 1979, recalls his first meeting with Glen as a simple exchange that didn't last very long. Knocking on the door to Glen's office, he introduced himself and said, "I'm looking for a job, are you hiring?" Glen nodded and replied, "Yep, I'll be with you in a minute." When they sat down in Glen's office, which Jim remembers for its dark panelling and rather dim atmosphere, the conversation lasted ten minutes, with Glen asking a handful of questions and then hiring him on the spot. "You start tomorrow," he said as he got up to leave.

Terry Trudel, who was hired in 1980, had an interview process that closely resembled Jim's—a short conversation and a few questions that ended with an immediate hiring and starting work the next day. Soon enough, he learned how much value Glen placed on people who were willing to work hard and who lived up to the potential that he saw in them. Within a few short months, Terry, who had started off as a welder, became the welding shop supervisor. "I thought, okay, this is good. This is growth," he says. It was one of countless examples of Glen giving employees the opportunity to grow within

the company. If someone showed that they were ready to take on more responsibility, Glen did not hesitate to give them the opportunity to do so.

Another trademark of Glen's particular leadership style was that as an entrepreneur with a passion for machines and hands-on work, he loved getting his hands dirty as much as he could. Long-time employees remember him for working side-by-side with them in the design of new machines and buildings, and immersing himself in whatever task needed to be completed. Having grown up on a farm, being personally involved in production was something that came naturally to Glen. Occasionally, this would lead to humorous moments, especially around people who weren't aware of Glen's passion for building and how much of a hands-on leader he was. Take, for example, the account of Barry Hill, who was only 19 at the time he was hired in 1988. During one of his first days on the job he was punching holes into a steel sheet, when he noticed a tall man walking through the plant wearing what Barry describes as "a big garbage man's coat." The coat was ripped open and covered in sawdust. Barry turned to another employee and with a smirk asked, "Who's this big doofus-looking guy?" "That would be Glen White, the owner and founder of the company," he was told. Glen had just finished working in his personal wood shop before making his rounds through the plant.



A large industrial factory interior with workers and machinery. The scene is dimly lit, with warm tones from overhead lights. In the background, a sign reads "5 TON". Several workers in hard hats and work clothes are visible, some standing near machinery. The overall atmosphere is one of a busy, large-scale manufacturing environment.

There were many ways Glen created a real family atmosphere at Steelway. Long-time employees remember his practice of saying goodbye to all the employees when they left at the end of their workday. Says Bryan Hernandez: "There he was standing in the door and shaking your hand as you left. He did that for years and years." Others, like Harley Venables, a Steelway employee since 1988, point to how Glen was always available to his employees: "If you had a concern, you could go to Glen. His door was open to anybody, anytime."

As much as Glen was a fun-loving, personable leader who made sure he was approachable at all times, he always kept his finger on the pulse of what his employees were doing. "He always had a question for you," says Darcey Westbrook, an employee since 1986. He was well known for patrolling the plant, keeping an eye on things to ensure that neither time nor material was wasted and everyone was giving it their best. He had very little tolerance for anyone venturing out of their work area during work time. Since Glen and Pat lived right next door to the plant, it was common for Glen to hop onto his bicycle and ride across the plant floor even if it was the middle of the night. "There were nights when you'd think he had gone to bed and you can take it easy, but here he had snuck in, riding his bike around," says Harley Venables.

As a driven entrepreneur who was intimately familiar with all processes and ultimately responsible for the overall success of the enterprise, Glen would hold employees accountable to their actions at any given time. Henry Boldt, who was hired as a welder in 1986, strongly remembers Glen for his "firm but fair" attitude and as a boss who placed high expectations on his employees. If mistakes were made, the onus was on the employee to fix them. As Scott Balyk, a Steelway employee since 1987, puts it: "If you screwed something up really badly, you were expected to fix it on your own time."

Accountability extended to Glen having employees justify why they threw out scrap metal pieces. Glen was known for pulling materials that he considered to still be useful for smaller projects out of the metal scrap bin. "On Monday mornings you'd come in and leaning against the scrap bin would be half a dozen plates. 'This is perfectly good material, what is this doing in the scrap bin?' Glen would ask," remembers Rob Collins.

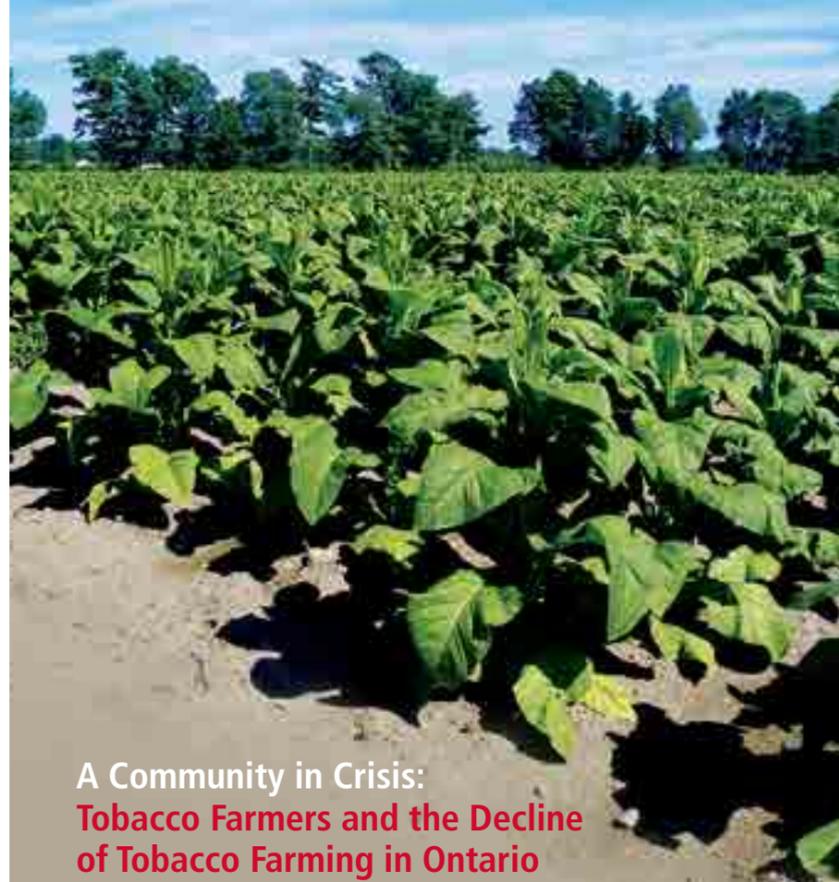
**“ He put a nervousness in you—a good nervousness. When he entered the plant floor or you had a discussion with him, there was a great deal of respect, and you knew there was a reason why you were having this discussion. ”**

- Terry Trudel

Long-time Steelway employees agree that Glen was the kind of leader who knew how to instill a sense of understanding of what was expected of everyone at Steelway. As Terry Trudel puts it: "He put a nervousness in you—a good nervousness. When he entered the plant floor or you had a discussion with him, there was a great deal of respect, and you knew there was a reason why you were having this discussion."

### Building Trust with Suppliers

Glen was always known in the industry as a man of integrity and someone who was loyal to the suppliers he chose to work with. In the same way that he wanted to be trusted, it was imperative for him to only do business with people and companies that he felt he could trust both on a personal and professional level. Glen had a way of testing suppliers when they first tried to be awarded Steelway's business. As with employees, if he saw potential in a supplier, the outcome would usually be a long-term relationship. One of Bill Hilton's first calls as a salesman for BOC Gases, selling welding supplies in the mid-1980s, was Steelway. When he met Glen for the first time during an unannounced visit to the office, Glen asked him a series of technical questions to which he had no immediate answer. "He asked me three or four technical questions and it was starting to hurt because I didn't have the answer to any of them. I said to Glen: 'I don't know that answer but if you need it right away, and you have a phone, I can find out.'" Bill ended up being awarded most of Steelway's welding supply business. Only years later did Glen tell him that he had set him up during that first meeting to see if he was going to tell the truth or make up answers to make a quick sale.



### A Community in Crisis: Tobacco Farmers and the Decline of Tobacco Farming in Ontario

The 1980s were marked by a dramatic decline in tobacco farming that affected virtually everyone in Elgin County. Tobacco farmers were faced with the effects of a government policy that became dominated by growing health concerns about smoking. A series of anti-smoking incentives resulted in a sharp decrease in the demand for tobacco which was a significant hit to a farming community that was struggling already. Blue mould had devastated nearly half of Ontario's tobacco crop in 1979, and an early frost in 1982 had the same effect. Financial hardships led to many farmers taking out loans at high interest rates of 20 percent or more in an attempt to recoup their losses.

Faced with debt, crippled crops and a dramatic decrease in demand, many tobacco farmers had only two options: sell their farms or switch to a stable and more profitable crop. Between 1981 and 1986, 28 percent of tobacco quota holders disappeared entirely. To help remaining farmers transition to an alternative crop, such as sweet corn, industrial hemp, peanuts or wheat grass, the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food established the Transition Crop Team in 1986. By the mid-1980s the end of tobacco farming in Ontario was no longer a question of if but when.<sup>8</sup>

This page top right and opposite page left: RCMP hangar in Goose Bay, 1987.  
Below: Honda dealership in Kentville, Nova Scotia, 1988.

### A Company in Transition

Having grown up on a farm in a mainly agricultural part of Ontario, Glen liked working with farmers. Not only that, the agricultural community had always been very good to him and his company. As Glen's vision for Steelway kept evolving, he wanted to create bigger and more complex structures and, naturally, his focus turned to commercial and industrial buildings. Without ever losing sight of the farming community he so loved, Glen knew that to follow his vision and to ensure the long-term success of Steelway, he needed to keep diversifying and ultimately transition the company into a solutions provider for the industrial, commercial, and recreational building markets.

Moving into commercial buildings offered the opportunity to keep building on Steelway's solid foundations while at the same time reaching a significantly larger market, both geographically and in terms of industries to be served. To thrive in a geographically bigger market, advertising would have to play a more important role. While word of mouth worked well within the much more narrowly defined farming community of southwestern Ontario, it simply was not a viable means for reaching out into areas with a greater population and industry density. To this end, 1981 saw the first long-term marketing effort directed towards non-tobacco farm buildings and commercial buildings as a whole.



In retrospect, Glen's strategy to diversify at the time he did proved to be immensely successful. It speaks to his vision as an entrepreneur that Steelway completed a number of commercial projects in the early 1980s already before the company had to face the hardships of a shrinking agricultural market. As Bryan Hernandez explains, "We were able to avoid that, which was good, because we would have gone bankrupt if we had kept all our eggs in that one basket."





## Sunhut Pool Enclosures

A hallmark of Glen's business strategy was to do things differently and devise his own solutions rather than following the lead of others. Based on this philosophy, and an expression of Glen's desire to diversify the company's product offerings, Steelway launched a series of outdoor pool enclosures under its newly created Sunhut brand in 1981. "Create your tropical paradise and a longer pool season for family fun" was the company's value proposition communicated to potential customers on the cover of its planning guide. "Take the plunge with a Sunhut" and "Summer showers won't dampen your poolside parties" were slogans used in advertising the new product line. Focusing on the residential and commercial outdoor pool market was a move made with great foresight as outdoor pools were becoming incredibly popular among home owners across North America.

A typical Sunhut enclosure was essentially a large greenhouse built over a pool encompassing the entirety of the pool. The structure of the building was designed using open web-style frames. The walls and the roof consisted of transparent rigid PVC sheeting, which gave the entire structure its "greenhouse effect" while leaving enough space between the walls and the pool itself for poolside objects such as beach chairs, tables or a barbecue.

The Sunhut pool enclosures became instantly popular because they offered a lot of value to customers who wanted to get the most out of their outdoor pool season. Acting as both a protection against heavy rain and wind, as well as functioning as a solarium greenhouse (or a “Florida room,” as one newspaper called it), it was a means to elongate the pool season and maximize the customer’s investment. This was all done at a reasonable price, too; a receipt made out on November 27, 1981 showed that a Sunhut enclosure was sold to a customer for \$12,305. All in all, it was a revolutionary idea at the time.

What stood out the most about Sunhuts, as the pool enclosures quickly became known, was that they were built to last. The original Sunhut is still in use today some 35 years later. Customers were extremely hard pressed to find a similar product built by a competitor that could offer the same quality and stability Steelway was providing. One of the reasons why Sunhut products gained a lot of momentum in the early days of production was that this was the only pool enclosure in all of North America that met national building codes. The fact that the frames were erected on reinforced

concrete slabs meant that Sunhut pool enclosures remained standing even in the event of a severe storm. Bryan Hernandez recalls learning about several dozen pool enclosures having collapsed during one winter in the northeastern United States. None of those were Steelway structures. In fact, Bryan remembers seeing a picture of a Sunhut pool enclosure in Atlantic City after a hurricane had torn through: “The Sunhut was still standing while the corner of the building was just dangling in the air.”

### New Plant in Aylmer

In order to increase capacity for the manufacturing of Sunhut pool enclosures, Steelway built a 12,000 square foot plant in the Industrial Park in nearby Aylmer in 1983. The thought behind creating a separate manufacturing space for the production of pool enclosures was that by having the company operate out of two locations, the growth of Sunhut would not interfere with Steelway’s core focus on building solutions for construction purposes at the main Springwater plant.

When the announcement was made in the newspapers that Steelway was opening up a second location in Aylmer, the town’s Deputy-Reeve, Don Pearson, was quoted as saying, “We couldn’t be happier. With the expansion plans he [Glen White] has, this can bring nothing but good news to the whole area.”<sup>9</sup> An open house was held on August 26, 1983, and was attended by approximately 100 people. It was a large showing of support from the very community that Glen and Pat had worked so hard to strengthen over the years.

### Spaceframe Building & New Roof Designs

Innovation did not stop with the Sunhut product line. In 1984, Steelway launched its new Spaceframe building system that was manufactured at the Aylmer plant and combined an open web-style steel frame with wood purlins and girts to give customers a cost-efficient alternative to all-wood buildings.

Promoted as “The high quality, affordable building system ... [that] ... can stretch your building, budget, interior space and lifetime value,” the Spaceframe system catered to the “do-it-yourself” market. Evidence of the strength of the Spaceframe design was Steelway’s display at the 1985 Elgin County International Plowing Match, where Fred White’s 4x4 Honda Civic was placed on top of an open Spaceframe building together with a billboard saying “Spaceframe—Built 4x4 Tough!”

Other product lines introduced during the 1980s include the Storm Loc-24, a premium standing seam roof system that came with a 20-year warranty for applications “where a leak-free roof is a must,” and Steelway’s more economic Storm Seal screw down roof system with field-caulked side laps. The Storm Seal roofing and matching wall system used light-gauge steel to create a high-strength panel capable of supporting large snow and wind loads. Offered in many colours and in a normal and wide rib version, Steelway’s Storm Seal cladding line was designed for multi-functional use as both siding and roofing.

### Going International: The Steelway Airplane Hangar in Antigua

By the mid-1980s, Glen’s original vision of Steelway operating within a 100-mile radius of Aylmer was already stretched beyond his wildest imagination, as the company’s prefabricated buildings began popping up all over Canada, from the Prairies to the East Coast. Yet another level was reached when, in 1985, Steelway was asked to provide a building for an airplane hangar for Liat Airlines in Antigua.

The order caused great excitement as it marked Steelway’s first international sale outside of North America. Glen was able to secure the Antigua contract by working with the Canadian Export Development Association, a crown corporation dedicated to helping Canadian companies respond to international business opportunities and develop the Canadian export trade. To Glen, this was more than just a one-time opportunity. Producing buildings for the south during the winter months when almost all construction in Canada comes to a halt, would help create stable employment for Steelway employees at a time that usually saw temporary layoffs due to a seasonal drop in sales. Looking back, the Antigua project opened the door for many more international projects in the years to come.

### Steelway Daycare

As the company was growing so too were Pat and Glen’s sons, Jason and Bryan. In order to keep an eye on the boys, Pat brought them to work every day, where they spent most of their time around the office. Whenever she had to go anywhere, she would take the boys with her. Jason reflects on his early childhood memories: “We didn’t have TV then, or any of those things to entertain us. Mom and Dad just dragged us around and took us everywhere they went for business.”

Not just the office, but the plant as well was a place to explore for the boys and one where they quickly knew every nook and cranny. Jason remembers operating the overhead cranes in the plant as soon as he was tall enough to push the buttons. “Bryan and I used to hook a nylon strap in a basket to sit on while we carried each other down the length of the



plant,” Jason remembers. Bryan was no less adventurous than his older brother. When he was old enough to be running around, he would climb on the stools in the drafting area while the employees were on break, take their rulers and draw all over the large pieces of paper they were using. The employees would come back to find all of their drafts mutilated by Bryan’s hand. They quickly learned to be careful about what they left out on their drafting boards. When Bryan started school, his kindergarten teacher was stunned when she discovered that, when asked to draw a square, he used a ruler to do so and held it properly. He had the drafting department to thank for that, no doubt!

It was truly a unique experience to say the least, as not many children grow up in a manufacturing plant operated by their parents. For Jason and Bryan, it fostered the same sort of love that would become integral to their futures that growing up on a farm had instilled in their father.



Opposite page: Drafting department at Steelway in the 1980s. This page: Growing up, Jason and Bryan White were often dressed in company apparel as captured in these class photos.

**“As a family, we decided that we had to choose to either continue farming or focus all our efforts and resources on Steelway. It was with this decision, that we ended our family’s long history as farmers.”**

- Pat White

### Southern Ontario Tomato Co-operative

In 1986, 21 former tobacco farmers, including Glen White, banded together to create the Southern Ontario Tomato Co-operative. Built on private investment and government funding, the Co-op was an attempt to turn former tobacco farmers into grower-processors of tomato paste produced from tomatoes grown on their lands as an alternative crop to tobacco. Glen had a significant stake in the enterprise and became the Co-op’s president. In a newspaper interview in March 1987, he described the Co-operative as “a prototype for grower-processors.”

The tomato crop of Co-op members was processed in the former Topaz tomato processing facility in St. Thomas that was purchased by the Co-op. Many of the growers involved shared the cost of buying harvesters and other equipment for joint use by the members. Since Glen had both the facilities and experience in producing equipment for use in farming operations, he built dump wagons that took the tomatoes from the harvester to the trailers, as well as the hoppers that were used on the trailers. Jason White reflects: “It was all old truck axles he would mount onto the frames he built. It was pretty crude by today’s standards, but it was something that was affordable for farmers at the time and it did the job.”

Right from the beginning, the Co-op had to compete with big established food processing corporations, like Heinz, in producing tomato paste. In spite of a clearly disadvantageous position, the Co-op produced 5 million pounds of paste in its first year. Unfortunately, it did not last and in 1988, when the Co-op lapsed, the Whites stopped growing tomatoes on their land altogether.



Inside views of the office in the 1980s. Left image left to right: Lyle Falkins and Brian Vernaleken reviewing drawings.



### Origins of the Steelway Departmental Structure

By the mid-1980s, Steelway employed over 50 people and was involved in several projects at any given time. As the company kept growing at a steady pace, with annual volume increases of 20 percent or greater, Glen found it increasingly challenging to maintain a close eye on every single facet of the company in the same way he once had. The shift towards higher volume and commercial buildings meant that there was a need to delegate, resulting in Steelway employees taking on new responsibilities. It also led to Steelway enlarging its existing office area. Moving forward, Glen needed more people and additional office space to help him manage the much larger company Steelway had become.

Joyce Matthews would see that the office was never the same again after she joined the company in 1987. Originally, she was supposed to be working for Rob Collins, who was also moving up to the front office to aid with purchasing. However, she quickly ended up working full-time for Glen. Having Joyce was an immense help because she was the only one who could decipher Glen’s handwriting. She remembers receiving a phone call from the girl who was filling in for her while she was sick at home one day. Her temporary replacement was in tears, worried that Glen was going to be upset because she needed to type a letter for him and couldn’t read his handwriting. Joyce called Glen and told him

not to worry and that she would take care of it the next day. “His handwriting was atrocious,” she says. “But I could fill in the blanks and I knew what he was trying to say.”

Creating an office was the initial step in the gradual evolution of a departmental structure with clearly assigned responsibilities at Steelway. The hiring of Lyle Falkins in 1980, who was to be Steelway’s key draftsman for years to come, had marked the beginning of an in-house drafting department. Prior to that, technical drawings had been scarce with most of the drafting work done on-site. The company’s first engineer being hired in 1987 marked another key milestone, as it turned Steelway into a turnkey manufacturer of building systems with in-house capabilities from design to the manufacturing of the structural steel, roof and walls. Step by step, new equipment and production lines and the hiring of the right people in key areas had turned Steelway into an integrated manufacturer of complete building systems.

The departmentalization process was accompanied by various initiatives to make the company and its employees act and look professional at all times. A dress code adopted in 1987 banned jeans and t-shirts, as well as running shoes for all office staff and stated that drivers in particular had to be presentable, as they were the employees that had the most contact with the customers. Jason wonders whether the dress code was enforced for more than a few days.



## Steelway Builder Network

Close relations with independent builders through the Steelway Builder Network have been a key contributor to the Steelway success story over the years. The early beginnings of the network go back to Glen working with Al Reid of Reid and DeLeye Contractors in 1979. In the mid-1980s, as Steelway buildings became ever more versatile and known for their quality, closer relationships between Steelway and selected builders started to develop. Within the evolving network structure, affiliated independent contractors began acting as intermediaries between Steelway and their own clients, using Steelway buildings on construction projects they were hired for by their customers.

The emerging network, which marked a fundamental change in the way Steelway engaged with customers, provided exciting new opportunities for both Steelway and its builder partners. Affiliated builders

would profit from operating as exclusive Steelway Builders within their respective areas while Steelway benefitted by gaining access to a much larger market. To Glen, building ever closer relationships with builders was part of his determination to always stay ahead of the curve and find ways to do things better than Steelway's competitors.

Greg Eyre of Reid and DeLeye Contractors explains the benefits from the early builder's perspective: "There was a period of time when you just had to tell the client that the building they were getting was manufactured in Aylmer and that it was an Ontario and Canadian product, and you would get the job that way." Bryan Hernandez explains the equally positive impact the builder network has had for Steelway: "The dealers helped us grow by selling our buildings to their customers. As a result, our area of operation started to grow throughout Ontario and beyond because they were going to have more contacts than we would." Clearly, it was a win-win situation that would help both Steelway and its affiliated builders in growing their respective businesses.

## Safety Requirements Change an Entire Industry

The 1980s marked the end of the "old days" in Ontario's manufacturing landscape. At Steelway, as in many other companies, defining safety standards and enforcing them to protect employees from work-related accidents became standard practice. Regulations and related procedures began reducing the amount of improvisation on the job while ensuring that things were done the proper way. At Steelway, the same policy document that had established the dress code in 1987 also mandated several safety requirements for all Steelway employees. Most importantly, it required employees who worked in production to wear approved safety wear, including protective footwear and glasses.

One employee who felt first-hand how seriously Glen took safety was Scott Balyk. He will never forget having to hand over his entire first hour's wage to Glen in cash on his first day as a new Steelway employee for violation of safety regulations. When he had come into work that Monday morning, his supervisor had told him that he didn't have time to show him around

for orientation. So Scott decided to learn by doing, and started wandering around the plant to get a sense of the place. While he was walking through the purlin area, Glen approached him from the opposite side of the plant. Scott, who had never met Glen before, was prepared to introduce himself and make a good first impression. He was stunned when the first words he heard coming out of his boss's mouth were "you owe me \$5." This was the amount that was owed by any Steelway employee for not wearing safety glasses inside the plant. "I was a young kid, it was my first job out of school, and that was how I first met Glen White. I think at that time I was making \$6 an hour so my first hour's wages were gone. I had to pay him cash too! And he stuck it into a jar on his desk!"

## Becoming a Manufacturer Only

Steelway's growing focus on commercial buildings, the company's expanded geographical reach through the evolving builder network, combined with new regulations applied to the erecting of commercial buildings brought with it more change to the way Steelway conducted business. In the same way that safety rules were changing the way things were done in the plant, new legislative requirements were impacting the way buildings could be set up at a job site. The days of Steelway employees, as Bryan Hernandez remembers, just shimmying up the beams without ladders and walking 40 or 50 feet high in the air wearing only minimal safety gear were quickly coming to an end.

One of the many ways that Steelway had distinguished itself from competitors in the past was the practice of loading a manufactured building system onto one

of the company's Ford Louisville trucks equipped with a Hiab crane, taking it to the customer's site in places as far away as Stouffville and New Liskard and putting up the shell for the customer. When faced with new rules that required companies to have licenses for crane operators, upgrade their insurance, and meet many other legislative requirements, Glen made the far-reaching decision to stop erecting buildings and focus entirely on manufacturing. As a result, Steelway began phasing its way out of erecting its own buildings over the course of a few years.

## Working Together— The Steelway Employee Association (SEA)

On January 5, 1987, a number of Steelway employees requested permission to form an employee committee responsible for addressing employment related subjects to management. As an employer who was personable, approachable and truly had the interest of his employees and their families at heart, Glen had no issue with the request, resulting in the founding of the Steelway Employee Committee. That same year, three representatives from the Springwater plant and two from the Aylmer plant were elected to represent the greater Steelway employee body.

The employee committee met for the first time on January 12, 1987, and within the span of a few months evolved into a full-fledged employee association. The April to June 1987 editions of the *Steelway News* congratulated employees and the company for the founding of the association and outlined its objectives to improve the quality of life of employees and to act as a focal point for community involvement.

There were a number of reasons for the formation of the Steelway Employee Association (SEA). For one, unions were trying hard to get into family-owned and operated businesses like Steelway. From the unions' perspective, the concept of the founder of a company making key decisions affecting employees independently went against the notion of collectivity that is at the heart of the unions' very claim to existence. Furthermore, by 1987, Steelway had grown to 75 employees, making it more difficult for Glen to interact with everyone personally to the same extent as he had in the past. Finally, the emergence of many new government regulations that focused on workers' interests, such as safety in the workplace provisions which proliferated throughout the 1980s and 1990s, further added to an environment in which having some form of employee representation simply made sense for most companies.

Prior to the founding of the SEA, Steelway employees were approached by various union representatives, urging them to join.



This page: Steelway Builder meetings in the late 1980s provided many networking opportunities in a more social environment. Opposite page: Members of the Steelway Employee Association baseball team.



Glen was a hands-on entrepreneur who operated a family business that he had built from scratch together with employees that he knew on a personal level and had real relationships with. Because of that, he was categorically opposed to letting the union into his facility. Furthermore, having to deal with a union carried the danger of losing key decision-making powers that he deemed critical to ensuring the continued success of the family business. Equally important, dealing with a union meant having to struggle with a highly organized body that could very easily bully him into making decisions that he wasn't comfortable making, simply due to the way he operated his business. At the same time, Glen did not see the need for Steelway employees to be unionized

as things were generally going well at Steelway, and very few, if any, employees had serious grievances with the way things were handled by the company. Glen further feared that letting the union in might negatively affect existing relations by subjecting employees to an external organization that was adversarial in nature and could strain what was a very good working relationship.

With all this in mind, forming an employee association, which would act as a sort of internal Steelway union was the perfect solution for both Steelway employees and for Glen. From the employees' perspective, choosing to establish an employee association over membership in a union meant maintaining a higher level of control over communications with

management while benefitting from an organized forum for presenting suggestions for improvement, negotiating wages and coordinating employee events and joint activities in the community. Not surprisingly, when the question of union membership was brought to a vote, Steelway employees voted against joining the union and for maintaining an open dialogue with Glen as members of the SEA.

As outlined in the objectives adopted in early 1987, involvement in the local community was a key focus area of the SEA right from the start. Parallel to the launch of the association, Steelway employees formed a baseball team that played in the St. Thomas league and was sponsored by the SEA. The first annual SEA golf tournament was held in 1988 and the first annual picnic

at the Springwater conservation area a year later, in September 1989. In tandem with the support it would receive from company ownership and management, the SEA became more than simply an organization for employees to negotiate with Glen and organize company events. To this day, it is an important cultural centerpiece of the company and its overall significance and contribution to the ongoing Steelway legacy cannot be overstated.

### Raising the Stakes— Profit Sharing at Steelway

Within a year of the founding of the SEA, profit sharing was introduced at Steelway in 1988 as a way of giving employees a higher stake in the company. A visit to

the Nucor plant in Indiana had prompted Glen to start thinking more seriously about the possibility of profit sharing at Steelway. At Nucor, the employees had a weekly target of production, and as long as that target was met they would receive a bonus on their pay. Glen further learned that motivated by the incentive of profit sharing, Nucor employees would meet after hours to make changes to the line to increase their output on occasions when they were falling behind.

Glen liked what he saw at Nucor and the positive effect profit sharing had on productivity in particular. He felt that if Steelway employees had a share of the profits, then everyone should have a deepened interest in making the company more profitable overall. On top of that,

it would give Steelway employees an incentive to further push the ideals of professionalism, quality and efficiency, which Glen held of the utmost importance for developing the Steelway brand. Clearly, everybody had something to gain from profit sharing, as long as everybody put the proper amount of work into it.

Once introduced, employee participation in the company's profit sharing plan quickly became a significant part of the larger Steelway culture. Profit sharing solidified that everyone at Steelway was part of the larger picture and the owner, management and employees worked together towards a common goal. In conjunction with the SEA, profit sharing was a genuine expression of the value Glen placed on Steelway employees and their families' well-being.

## The End of Sunhut

Successful entrepreneurship is as much about making tough decisions and correcting the course at times as it is about holding on to the larger overall vision. In 1987, in what turned out to be a watershed moment in the history of Steelway, Glen was faced with the difficult choice to either continue or terminate the production of the Sunhut line of products.

As noted previously, Sunhut pool enclosures had been rather popular when originally introduced back in 1981. Unfortunately, one of the key strengths of the product—its ability to withstand strong winds and adverse weather conditions—turned out to be a key contributor to its downfall in the end. Since the pool enclosures were attached to the ground through solid concrete foundations, they were considered permanent structures and, as such, required customers to obtain a building permit. In urban areas especially, it was very difficult to get that permit from the authorities, ultimately preventing the Sunhut division from gaining a lot of traction.

Over time, the Sunhut had become the insignificant product in the Aylmer plant which had been expanded in 1986. Meanwhile, the Storm Loc, Storm Seal and Spaceframe products that were manufactured in the Aylmer facility as well had become so popular that a decision in regards to the future of the Sunhut needed to be

made. Adding to the challenge was the fact that all these products had to be transported back to the main Springwater plant in order to ship them out with the buildings. As a result, in 1987, Glen decided to terminate the Sunhut brand altogether, sell the Aylmer plant and move the other production back into a newly expanded area at the Springwater plant.

On a larger scale, and even though the agreement did not come into effect until 1994, there was lots of talk at the time about the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and its potentially negative effects on Canadian manufacturing businesses. As competition from Mexico as well as from larger players in the U.S. became an ever more realistic possibility, Canadian manufacturers like Steelway had to be even more competitive to be able to operate in an increasingly global market place.

As it turned out, dropping the Sunhut line, selling the Aylmer plant and moving the equipment into a large addition to the Springwater location were necessary steps in allowing Steelway to consolidate its product offerings and redouble its focus on those parts of the company that were thriving. With an eye to the future, concentrating operations in one location would further help Steelway invest into a higher level of automation and computerization which was becoming paramount to companies being able to compete in a larger market built on free trade.





## AutoCAD Revolutionizes the Drafting Process

Adopting CAD (computer assisted drafting) technology in 1988 marked a key turning point in the drafting process. The AutoCAD design system is a commercial software application for both 2D and 3D computer-aided design and drafting, allowing users to create highly detailed, effective designs via computer, rather than drawing them out by hand. AutoCAD revolutionized the way Steelway approached the design of buildings. Most notably, it significantly increased accuracy and volume output. Glen was fascinated with the new technology. In a later interview with the local media he emphasized the fundamental changes CAD technology had brought to Steelway: “By directly downloading data, there is increased accuracy, a reduction in the time required and a record keeping efficiency,” he said. “The drafting boards have been moved into storage, and everything is done on a CAD system here. We’re doing some downloading from the CAD system to the machines on the floor.”<sup>10</sup>

## The New CNC Plasma System

As new technology became available, Glen did not hesitate to invest into modern computerized machines that increased speed, accuracy and quality. A key improvement to Steelway’s manufacturing processes was the purchasing of a high-tech CNC

plasma cutting system in 1989. The plasma system was, in essence, a robot in all functionality, taking designs that were drafted using a computer and cutting parts out of sheet steel up to a maximum size of 10 by 40 feet. The cutting of the steel was done by an electric torch that replaced the older oxygen-fueled system, commonly referred to as an oxy-acetylene torch.

The key advantage of the plasma cutter from a production standpoint was that it significantly improved the process of constructing steel webs. Steel webs used for construction were originally made using a crane to put sheet steel in a shear that would cut pieces of up to 10 feet in length. It was a tedious process that was extremely labour intensive. The plasma cutter improved the production of these webs exponentially by allowing employees to cut two pieces side by side and to an extended length of up to 20 feet.

To become proficient in operating the complex machine, 14 Steelway employees were trained on the new equipment, aided by a federal government program that subsidized 5,000 hours of hands-on and classroom instruction. When Barry Hill began working on the new machine, he felt like it was taken straight out of a science fiction movie. “In my view, it was the single biggest improvement we made,” he reflects.

## Looking Towards a Great Future

By the end of the 1980s, operating out of a 64,000 square foot facility, Steelway had become a recognized brand and a multimillion-dollar company with a distinct culture that was equipped with modern machinery and a workforce of over 100 qualified employees. Bigger and more complex projects had been made possible by a series of plant expansions, significant investments into people and new machinery, and the introduction of new product lines. The transitioning towards being a supplier of prefabricated building systems for commercial and industrial use was almost complete, with commercial and industrial projects accounting for 95 percent of the overall volume. Sales in 1989 had grown to \$10 million, a 43 percent increase over 1988, making 1989 a record year in the company books. At the same time, the growing builder network had become a key contributor to the Steelway success story. By making far-reaching decisions, Glen had taken his company and moved it to where he knew it could achieve long-term sustainability and success.



Top: Vern Furber, president of Elgin-St. Thomas United Way, front left, and Susan Johnson, Aylmer United Way chairperson, accept a cheque from Sheldon Pressey, president of the Steelway Employee Association, and Glen White in 1989. Bottom left: Plant tour at the 1988 Open House. Middle right: Steelway Christmas Party. Bottom right: Steelway Float at the Aylmer Christmas Parade.



LEADING THE WAY

04



In 1990, the St. Thomas and District Chamber of Commerce awarded Glen and Pat the Free Enterprise Award of Merit. In his acceptance speech, Glen attributed the success of the company to a multitude of factors. "The answer to success is not a simple one. The company grew one step at a time, responding to the needs of the market and taking advantage of any opportunities that became available. Our dedication to a professional quality product, with attention to detail, and making available what the customer really wants was a large factor in our success," Glen explained. He then went on to emphasize how instrumental Pat's role had been in building the business. "I have to give a lot of credit to a very understanding wife," he said.<sup>11</sup>

## Getting Caught in the Recession

Despite all of the success, progress, and forward momentum that the company had enjoyed in the previous decade, 1990 turned out to be the most challenging year in the history of Steelway. Coming in the wake of "Black Monday" (October 19, 1987, the day when the value of stock markets around the world tumbled drastically), 1990 marked the beginning of a major recession particularly in the United States, Canada and other countries linked closely with the U.S. economy. That year also saw the beginning of the First Gulf War which resulted in a spike in the price of oil, increased inflation and reduced consumer spending. The next several years were characterized by high unemployment, massive government deficits, and a dramatic drop in demand for manufactured products.

Steelway was not immune to these economic forces and the multi-year recession ended up taking a heavy toll on the company. For the first time in its history,

Steelway did not move forward as sales dropped to \$3.5 million in 1990 and the capital and operating debt the company had taken on to finance its growth throughout the 1980s became a mounting challenge in dealing with the bank.

Glen and the management team were forced to take drastic measures in order to mitigate losses. As unfortunate as it was, layoffs were unavoidable and many employees—particularly those who worked in the office—lost their jobs because there was simply nothing for them to do. A number of employees working on the plant floor suffered the same fate, although Glen did everything in his power to make this a temporary measure only. Terry Trudel recalls that when the downturn came, employees took turns being laid off. "We were laid off, and then we came right back," he says. "It wasn't even long enough to collect unemployment benefits."

As entrepreneurs committed to seeing their company through the crisis, Glen and Pat felt the pressure of the recession

on a personal level as well, as they decided to mortgage virtually everything they owned and reinvest the money into their struggling company. Faced with the recession there was no choice but to cut costs wherever possible. Things got so bad that Glen even went out of his way to reduce utility bills to remain in operation. "A lot of days, we didn't even have lights on in the shop. It was that bad," Ken Jones reflects. Steelway suppliers were told, with Glen sitting in on every meeting, that Steelway would be unable to pay them unless it would be allowed to extend its accounts payable to 120 days. Ted Oliver, a chartered accountant hired by Glen to help manage the company's finances during this most challenging time, doesn't recall a single argument over this stipulation. "The suppliers effectively believed in Glen, and that was what allowed us to survive." It was certainly a difficult time in the history of Steelway, but it wasn't going to be the end of the company. Glen and Pat and the Steelway family would find a way to persevere, just as they always had.

# Steelway cuts costs, remains competitive

Versatility and adaptability are essential elements at Steelway Building Systems. Glen White, owner of the Springwater business training... "We have sophisticated... Exports boost firm, but..."

## Rural company still relies on Canadian construction

BY PATRICIA WILLIAMS  
STAFF WRITER

AYLMER, Ont.—Glen White has been making steel-building systems for clients in a variety of markets since 1976. He turned a talent for metalwork-into a full-time endeavor after a neighbor's metal storage shed for a neighborhood in southern Ontario al activity in... well that orders began... coming in steadily... business practice... of Antigua... you can... Steelway president White says of his firm's decision to seek contracts abroad. "The Canadian market is a cyclical one. Construction is probably more prone to cycles than some other aspects of the economy. "If you have some export (business) to rely on, you can keep your- self busy in those times when you have a little less Canadian market- place." Steelway's administrative office have a countrified air, with exposed wood beams and displays of antique farming implements and machinery parts. But the company keeps pace the times, employing a computer design and engineering system th integrated with shop floor activity. Steelway hopes to receive In- ternational Organization for Standard- ization (ISO) 9001 certification b- tember, which the company sa- tes it one of only two North- American firms in the steel-build- ing business with the rating. The company already is c- the Canadian Standards Ass- A660 quality standard as a- turer of steel-building syste- Steelway's current co- clude a 98,700-square- centre in Vaughan, Ont. square-foot building for- © AYLMER, Page A7

"You can't... in the sand... train people to... change. People... change makes... comfortable life,"

The company... about 50 workers... range from in-pla... tion, to market... ting, purchasing and... ing design. Started by Mr... 1976, Steelway desig... manufactures pre-engi... steel building systems. T... cludes steel roof... framework and siding. In its products, Steelw... uses mainly steel which con... from Dofasco in Hamil...

"It's simply good business practice to have as diversified a market as you can." Glen White

## Resetting the Course

With the drop in sales and finances running tight, Glen and his team needed to re-evaluate the company and devise a way to move forward. The temporary layoffs and cost-cutting measures were a start, but they were only a bandage to stop the bleeding. A stronger effort with a deeper focus was needed to deal with the external pressures of a staggering economy and to convince the bank that Steelway was still a viable business worth investing into.

One of the most humiliating experiences for Glen as an entrepreneur and one that only added to his extreme dislike for bankers was being sent to a special banking unit by the Bank of Montreal. With Steelway getting close to insolvency, the Bank of Montreal brought in a consultant to work with the management team to prevent the company from going under. Together

they reviewed key aspects of the operation including management structures, order entry, scheduling, marketing and production. The consultant made Glen and the management team draw up a series of action and profit improvement plans to help coordinate efforts in order to beat the recession. "That was my first time going about formal goal setting or working with action plans," Rob Collins remembers. "I reflect on that because that consultant gave us the tools and forced us to do these things." The consultant told Glen in a brisk manner that he would go back to the Bank of Montreal in three months and recommend whether or not to shut Steelway down. If Glen followed his directions and made the necessary changes, the consultant would give the bank a good report. If not, he would simply tell his bosses that it wasn't worth their time to keep bankrolling the company.

Admittedly, Glen wasn't exactly an expert when it came to strategic financial planning and while Pat had an accounting background, the task was so monumental that she couldn't quite manage it on her own either. That is where Ted Oliver came in. A chartered accountant by trade with industry experience, Ted joined Steelway on a consulting basis in November 1990. "I need some help to put together some strategic planning and financial packages for the bank," Glen told him. Ted started with implementing a costing system that allowed Steelway to better understand its production costs. Together, the two of them managed to please the bank enough to save the company from defaulting. "I wouldn't say the bank was happy with us but they came through with the finances we needed to keep the company afloat," recalls Ted.

The Steelway plant with the new drafting and engineering office addition completed in 1990.



To implement the necessary changes, Glen and the management team devised a new business plan, one that placed a greater focus on the managerial and organizational perspective of the company. A memo that was circulated in 1991 highlighted the strategic issues that were understood to be the focal point of the company's revised efforts. The note, titled simply "Strategic Issues," listed three areas to be tackled head-on:

- Improve profitability by Improved Cost Controls, Management Information Systems and Standard Cost System
- Restructure Manufacturing and Asset Control Systems and upgrade standards
- Improve profitability by increased market share

With a clearly defined goal in mind, Glen guided the company forward, paying closer attention to processes at all levels of the organization to increase accountability, efficiency and profitability. As Steelway became a leaner company, costs went down, while renewed efforts were put in to increasing market share via a heavy emphasis on advertising and marketing and building relationships with builders across Canada.

## Recovery and Turnaround of Steelway

Newspapers covered the struggle and subsequent recovery of the company with a keen eye, knowing that Steelway's fate would have tremendous impact on the local economy. In an article published in the Aylmer Express on June 12, 1991, Glen reassured readers in a blunt, but positive manner: "Remaining competitive in the global economy of the 1990s is Steelway's biggest challenge. Although the recession has affected Steelway very seriously, we feel that there is a tremendous amount of optimism out there."<sup>12</sup> When asked about his plans for getting the company back on track, Glen told the reporter that Steelway would achieve its set goals by "having a good management team and developing well-trained, well-motivated employees who work together as a team." Reaffirming the company's key strategic objective of becoming more profitable, Glen emphasized that removing unnecessary costs would be critical to the long-term success of Steelway in a changed economy.<sup>13</sup>

In 1993/94, Steelway built 22 bulletproof buildings for Bell Canada for installation in remote locations across Northern Canada. They were designed with two layers of armour plate under the exterior cladding. The picture shows one of them being pulled out of the plant on a rail system.





A Ministry of Transportation of Ontario inspector levied a \$200 fine against a float from the Steelway Building Systems Employees Association headed for the Aylmer Kinsmen Santa Claus Parade Saturday, November 24, because the trailer was seven inches too wide for normal highway passage.



The turnaround of Steelway was nothing short of remarkable. Within two years from the onset of the recession, the company had not only recovered, but doubled its volume compared to its pre-recession productivity. By 1993, sales returned to the 1989 record year level and a year later employment was back at over 100 people. Processes and productivity levels had improved so much that by 1994, in direct comparison to the record sales year of 1989, the same number of employees produced twice the volume. To everyone's relief, 1994 turned out to be the best year in the company's history, as Steelway broke the \$1 million profit mark for the very first time. A year later, Steelway set a new sales record of \$20 million, to be surpassed by \$35 million in 1999.

Key to Steelway's ability to turn things around was a restructuring of the office and the investing of significant resources into sales and marketing. Ed Thomson,

who joined Steelway as VP Sales and Marketing in 1991, was instrumental in this process. He came to Steelway with lots of experience and a thorough understanding of the industry from years of working with a competitor of Steelway's. Dennis Bak, the current VP of Engineering who started with the company in 1989, is adamant that the real game changer for Steelway during the recession was the creation of the marketing department and the hiring of Ed. "Basically, almost immediately after we hired Ed, sales exploded!" he says. Ted Oliver concurs: "Glen had a really good business, he could manufacture like nobody else, but he needed someone like Ed to sell the product."

Changes to the sales side of the business that made Steelway so much more profitable included the creation of district sales manager positions for both Ontario and Atlantic Canada, and later for Western Canada as well. Today, Steelway has four

district sales managers with responsibilities for Atlantic Canada, Eastern and Northern Ontario, Western and Southern Ontario, and Western Canada. Having district managers allowed Steelway to become more strategic in growing the Steelway Builder Network by going into regional building associations as well as connecting with builders one-on-one. Ralph Clarke who joined Steelway in 1990 as District Sales Manager for Atlantic Canada, reflects: "After I joined Steelway, many of the builders that I had relationships with joined me and switched to Steelway as well. It wasn't long before we had a full network of builders in the Atlantic region." Having people in the right geographical locations across Canada allowed Steelway to establish a much wider sales base, creating a key stepping stone for transforming the business from being a regional player into a company of national reach across Canada.



## Investing into the Future

Exhibiting the same pattern he had shown during the recession of the 1980s, Glen saw the economic woes of the beginning of the 1990s as an opportunity to keep investing into the company. Bryan Hernandez reflects: "When the economy is down and everything seems to be at the lowest is when the Whites seem to spend the most money and reinvest into the company for the future." Knowing her husband's tendency to buy new equipment for cheap during times of economic turmoil, Pat wasn't too thrilled when learning about the onset of the recession. As Rob Collins recalls, several employees in the front office found Pat's reaction quite humorous: "Oh, great, another recession. How much money are you going to be spending this time, Glen?"

Glen was both a risk-taker and a visionary who always looked multiple steps ahead from a manufacturing perspective. As long as he knew that the payoff would ultimately benefit the company, he was willing to make the investment. Ted Oliver remembers an exchange he had with Glen during the recession. Although Steelway had very limited disposable funds available, Glen wanted to buy a new machine he felt he needed in order to ramp up production and increase output. Ted agreed with Glen that the machine would be highly beneficial to Steelway, yet its price tag of about \$190,000 constituted a major road block for him. "Glen, I don't want to say anything, but where are you going to get the money?" he asked. "I don't think that you can justify buying this machine." Glen looked Ted calmly in the eye and said: "I have one good reason to buy that machine." "What's that reason?" Ted wanted to know. "I own the company," Glen informed him matter-of-factly. Ted nodded, "That's good enough for me. Let's go get that machine."

Opposite page: Caricature published in the Aylmer Express in November 1990 after the Steelway Christmas Float, while on its way to the Christmas Parade, had been stopped by an M.T.O. officer and fined \$203 because the float was seven inches too wide for normal highway use. This page: Construction of the powder paint line installed in 1995.

## Steelway Custom Manufacturing

A key to Steelway's growth and success from early on was that Glen kept building capabilities through the addition of new equipment and a series of plant expansions. What was unique about his approach to equipment was that he would not purchase entire lines, but only key machines and then design and build the line himself to fit Steelway's unique requirements. Greg Eyre of Reid and DeLeye explains: "Glen was extremely innovative. All the processes that he, for lack of a better description, invented—he was never really afraid of anything. He could think of ways to do things better. It didn't matter that the process didn't exist or no one had ever tried it before, he had the ability to conjure it up and make it work."

A natural-born engineer with a life-long passion for building things, Glen was so instrumental in designing and building equipment for Steelway that employees, with great respect, nicknamed him "The Great White Owl" and "Glengineer." Kevin Gough remembers working closely with Glen on special projects in the late 1990s: "You didn't go to the trade show in Toronto and just buy a machine. At Steelway, you got to help build your own equipment." Lloyd Johnson, who looked after maintenance, played an important role in this highly creative process. "Lloyd helped Glen build this place. He could patch things up and make things work," says Harley Venables. "He only needed three tools—electrical tape, vice grips and an adjustable wrench," Jim Latam adds.

An expression of his vision for the company, Glen was usually thinking multiple steps ahead. A typical conversation when discussing a new idea would include employees raising doubts as to whether what he had in mind could actually be executed only to find out in retrospect that Glen's direction was right. "There was always a solution and a way forward, whether you agreed with it or not," says Kevin Gough. To make his own creations more official, machines designed and built by Glen and his Special Projects team became labeled SCM—Steelway Custom Manufacturing. To this day, there are still a number of machines in the plant that have that label on them, attesting to the longevity of the solutions devised over twenty years ago.

**“ There was always a solution and a way forward, whether you agreed with it or not. ”**

- Kevin Gough



This and opposite page: Inside views of the Steelway plant in 1997.



Glen would often get new ideas for how to do things differently while visiting trade shows and competitors' plants. "This is where he really shined. He could come up with a better way to do things from seeing the way others did it," says Rob Collins. Builder Al Reid concurs: "I'd catch up with him at the metal show in Las Vegas almost every year. Glen would always come down and do tours of the competitors' plants." Ted Oliver remembers Glen being "like a sponge" while the two men visited a number of building plants together during a road trip in the United States. For Glen, it was never about copying what a competitor was doing. It was about getting the inspiration for taking things to another level at Steelway. Says Ted Oliver: "It wasn't academic learning. He just absorbed everything and said, 'okay, we can bring this back and make it work even better at our place.'" Bryan Hernandez, who accompanied Glen on some plant visits as well, adds: "His finger was always on the pulse of what was going on and how he could improve what he saw. Going into all these other plants gave him food for thought. And many times he told me, 'we are doing it better.'"

Everybody who worked with Glen knew that he was always thinking about equipment and processes, the rationale behind them and how to keep improving them to make Steelway even better. He always carried a black leather portfolio note book so he could write down thoughts and create drawings whenever a new idea crossed his mind. This included waking up in the middle of the night and writing and drawing in his book or using the lunch break at a dealer meeting in Florida to draw up a design. Ed Thomson remembers: "During one of the early builder meetings in Florida everyone was outside having lunch and there was Glen over in a corner at a table by himself drawing. I went over to him and asked, 'what are you up to?' and he said, 'this is a new part we need for one of the machines in the shop, so I am trying to design it here.'"

Glen being a constant thinker was a blessing and a curse at the same time for those working closely with him on the implementation of his ideas. It was a blessing in so far as Glen was always eager to hear peoples' thoughts even though discussions could sometimes turn into a heated argument. It was a curse at the same time because he would often communicate ideas and ask for their execution without providing a lot of detail, leaving it to his employees to fill in the gaps.

His soapstone sketches and drawings on the factory floor, on a piece of wood or a napkin are well-known among long-time Steelway employees. Harley Venables remembers: "He would draw diagrams on the floor and we were supposed to memorize them." Brian DeJeu, who had joined Steelway in 1995 and who would often finalize Glen's drawings in AutoCAD, concurs: "A lot of times you would come in to work and Glen had been on the road traveling and he would show up with a napkin with a sketch on it and would say, 'this is what we are working on.'" "He would draw on two by fours or plywood," Kevin Gough adds.

To add to the challenge for employees working with Glen on special projects, Glen would often change things around as the details became clear to him. Jake Giesbrecht, who was hired right out of high school in 1997, explains: "He would always have something in his head but it was never in a drawing. When we got drawings, we would start working with them and then he would take the paper away from us, go home, scribble on it, and come back later and say, 'modify it to this.'"

Ultimately, Glen having a creative mind that was constantly going and making his

employees part of the creation process allowed people at Steelway to become the most skilled in the industry. Says Bryan Hernandez: "He encouraged people to grow and encouraged people's ideas." Rob Collins concurs: "There was always that perception that Glen wanted you to put your ideas in because he never really gave you 100 percent of the information you needed; he just assumed that you would pick it up." By the same token, Jim Latam will never forget Glen's answer when he asked him for the manual for the new purlin mill Glen had designed: "I asked him for the manual and he said, 'you are writing it.'" It was Glen's way of saying, "I trust in your ability to figure it out."

## Computerization of Steelway

Computer technology was evolving quickly in the 1990s prompting Glen to invest into the computerization of Steelway to remain at the forefront of the industry. Steelway had begun utilizing computers during the 1980s already, but now they were being applied throughout the organization including on the production floor. Steelway incorporated its first real computer system, a Management Information System (MIS) with software called Visual Manufacturing, in 1994. A design and engineering program that was known as Metal Building Software (MBS) further added to Steelway's design capabilities. The original network consisted of 25 linked computers. Within two years, it grew to 46 machines, quickly followed by the first use of inter-office email in 1997.

To cement the transition to the new computer systems, Glen made it a requirement that going forward all new employees hired by the company would need to be computer literate. He further

challenged all employees to learn how to operate a computer. "I'm saying you won't be employed at Steelway unless you can operate a computer. Everyone is going to have to know how to operate a computer," he announced. As personal computers became more and more popular, Steelway helped employees purchase a computer for their home through a purchasing plan that allowed them to pay for their own personal computer through payroll deductions.

In spite of being an ardent believer in using computers in the design and production of Steelway buildings, Glen personally remained a pen and paper person. He did not adapt to the computer easily, as his personal concept of drafting was waking up in the middle of the night with an idea and sketching it out in his little note book that he made sure was accessible at all times. Dennis Bak remembers installing a computer for Glen on his desk. "His desk was this big old thing with a mound of papers on it," he says. "Next to it were even bigger piles on the floor." After setting up the computer, employees taught Glen how to use the internet and send emails. But even still, he would not use it. "I remember I would send him emails and Glen would never reply to them. Instead, he would come down from his office and talk to me directly," Dennis recalls. Months went by without a single email response when one day, out of the blue, Dennis received an email from Glen. He immediately went upstairs to talk to Glen and could not have been more surprised by Glen's explanation. "Oh! I just found the reply button!" Glen proudly proclaimed.



Left: The Steelway Employee Association presents a fundraising cheque in 1990. Right: A company trip to Dofasco Steel in Hamilton, Ontario.

## Employee Benefits

As the company continued to prosper, Glen made sure to increase employee benefits. Building onto the strong foundations laid with the creation of the SEA and the introduction of profit sharing in the 1980s, the 1990s saw the company provide further health benefits, a re-examination of wage benefits, and the inclusion of an registered retirement savings plan (RRSP). In adding benefits, Glen went much further than what would have been expected from a company the size of Steelway. An expression of Glen's commitment to employees, Steelway matched every dollar employees put into the RRSP and the health benefits equalled those of much larger corporations.

Glen, for his part, worked very well with the SEA when negotiating Wage and Benefit Agreements. Together with SEA representatives, he would go through the contract piece by piece, making sure that no detail was glossed over and that everyone was on the same page. As Joyce Matthews recalls, Glen always went out of his way to make sure that his mind was understood, and if he rejected something, it wasn't simply because he didn't like it. "He may not always agree with you, but he always listened. And if he didn't agree, there was

a reason why he didn't agree. There was no 'you can't have this because I'm the boss and that's that.' We always seemed to work through it and came out friendly."

Outside of the SEA, Glen institutionalized input from employees in the form of regular group meetings during which he invited feedback on how to improve processes and job satisfaction at Steelway. Born out of Glen's personal initiative and his desire to keep a hand on the pulse of the company, these group meetings provided a forum for employees to speak their minds on anything related to their work. Denis Therrien remembers: "It didn't matter what you had to say—it could be a positive or negative comment. He just said, 'get it off your chest.' I really respect him for that." Sheldon Pressey concurs: "He took a lot of criticism at those meetings as well, but he didn't get upset at us for it at all." It was Glen's way of making sure that employees were happy and the company kept evolving and getting better at all times. Today, the practice Glen established continues through monthly meetings where management shares with employees matters of significance to the company in the most transparent manner, including financials, profits and planned new purchases.

# Cubans interested in Aylmer product

## Local steel building company spans world-wide markets

From telecommunications buildings to truck terminals, Glen White plans to lead Steelway Building Systems into the future "by adapting to a changing world."

The company is a division of Glen White Industries Ltd., an enterprise that has grown from a husband and wife operation in 1976 to a workforce of 50 with markets around the world.

Situated on Elgin County Road 40, south of Springwater Conservation Area, the 80,000 square foot plant is just a stone throw from the original tiny site where the business began, behind the White home.

Mr. White said his company provides "steel building systems and components for use in industry, commercial operations, recreation, and agriculture."



Staff relations are important to Mr. White who does not want to be seen as sitting in an ivory tower simply because he is company president. He tries to know the names of the workers and efforts to maintain communication include a lunchtime barbecue once a month.

"Generally, people don't trust management," he said, "and I try to let them know I am a fair and honest person by getting involved with them."

Keeping workers informed helped the company remain competitive.

Looking to the future "I believe the balance of 1992 is going to be difficult. But in the long term, things will be extremely positive as we will see new products and, in one or two years, greater market potential."

Business decline in a receding economy couldn't be helped.

He believes in a good product, excellent people on staff, high quality representatives and good dealers.

The economy was the key. "It allows things to happen."

A resident of Springwater area all his life, Mr. White and his wife Pat have two sons. Mrs. White is a full partner in the business. He described her as "the mainstay of the operation."

He is also president of the Canadian Sheet Steel Builders

is paramount in developing and maintaining a edge in a competitive market.

so many foreign workforce would ever get that suspected they were large again.

## Steelway building facility in Aruba

The structures are designed and engineered in the local plant.

Steelway Building Systems of Springwater is supplying a large bulk storage building on the Caribbean island of Aruba.

The 258 foot wide, 750 feet long, 150 foot high building will be used by Refineries to store of the oil

cial, agricultural and recreational markets.

From its 100,000 square foot Aylmer area manufacturing plant, Steelway designs, manufactures and markets buildings across Canada, the northern United States and in 12 countries around the world.

Current local projects include expansion

## Nepal, Cuba & Aruba—International Projects

Expanding into new export markets was a significant contributor to the growth of Steelway during the 1990s. Some of the most exciting projects of the decade relate to Steelway buildings going up in places in Asia, Africa, Europe, the Caribbean, and elsewhere around the globe. Steelway buildings were erected in Nepal, Latvia, Lithuania, Ghana, Cuba, Mexico, Aruba and Iceland, among others. With an eye to the cyclical character of the Canadian construction market due to heavy winters, Glen explained in 1997: "It's simply good business practice to have as diversified a market as you can. If you have some export business to rely on, you can keep yourself busy in those times when you have a little less Canadian marketplace."<sup>14</sup>

Steelway negotiated some of its international contracts directly with foreign governments through the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), an organization founded in 1968 to administer foreign aid programs in developing countries and that has since been renamed Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development. Most offshore business, however, was presented to Steelway through builders in its growing builder network. Aveiro Constructors of Dorchester, Ontario, was particularly important in procuring international contracts involving Steelway. Some of these international projects were so unique and required such a level of creativity on the design, manufacturing, shipping and construction that they turned out to be catalysts in the evolution of the

"we can stand up to any challenge" spirit that has remained a key element of the Steelway culture to this day.

The ongoing popularity of Steelway buildings outside of Canada has a lot to do with their quality and ability to withstand high winds, exposure to salt water, and even earthquakes. Steelway does not cut corners and designs every building for its intended purpose. In the context of development projects through CIDA, Steelway further benefited from Canadian content rules as the only Canadian manufacturer of complete building systems not only manufacturing in Canada, but also using only Canadian components in its structures. When interviewed in 1993, Glen attributed the fact that Steelway had done business in seven countries and six Canadian provinces and territories over the last 18 months to Canadian manufacturers' competitiveness and their great reputation in both the national and international market.<sup>15</sup>

In 1991, Steelway manufactured an airplane hangar for the airport in Kathmandu, Nepal through CIDA. It was a project that is viewed as a milestone project for its many challenges. After arriving in Calcutta, India, the containers were loaded onto 20-foot trucks which were technically too short for the 40-foot length of the containers. While the trucks traveled on rough roads through the mountains one container was lost for a month after the truck carrying it broke down. Lacking sufficient road infrastructure, the Nepalese government even had to build additional roads to where the airport is located so that the Steelway containers could reach their final destination. Mario Aveiro, whose company put up the structure, remembers "moving steel literally by hand with a crew of 400 Nepalese people" as the

building was assembled on site. To further complicate what was already a challenging project from a logistical perspective, when the SL-24 roofing arrived, it had been damaged on the truck, prompting the Aveiro team to develop a tool at the site to fix the damaged material.

In 1992, a delegation from Cuba visited Steelway to discuss details for a total of six structures to be erected in four different locations on the island. Ranging in size from 5,000 to 20,000 square feet, all of these buildings were related to the growing Cuban tourism industry. Designed and manufactured by Steelway, the structures were erected by Cuban labour under the supervision of XDG Construction from Kitchener, Ontario. The airport terminal in Havana, which resulted from this initiative, is remembered by long-time Steelway employees as being a particularly unique project. It was an opportunity of a lifetime that revealed once again Glen's determination to keep growing the company by never saying "no" to a good challenge. Rob Collins remembers asking Glen why he was even considering the project, as it came with various strings attached. "We have the opportunity and none of our competitors will even touch this. And we have a strong chance of getting the job," Glen simply told him.

The key challenge was a stipulation in the contract that bound Steelway to an incredibly tight timeline. Manufacturing, delivery and construction all had to be completed by May 15 because revolutionary leader Fidel Castro was scheduled to be present at the grand opening ceremony that day. Steelway was informed by the Cuban authorities that the ribbon would be cut that day, no matter what.

## Aylmer firm builds Nepal aircraft hanger

AYLMER - An aircraft hangar manufactured in the Aylmer area has been forwarded to Nepal for transporting and erection of the building in Nepal.

A.E. Jan. 22 1997

Rob Collins recalls that the Steelway team started feeling the pressure when some complications arose and the deadline kept getting closer. "We were working on it, doing the construction and the deadline was getting closer and closer, and we seemed to be getting further and further behind. Soon we were asking ourselves 'what do we need to do to get it done and sent down there?'" he recalls. Equally determined to see the project come to completion, the Cubans lent a helping hand, sending the largest plane available to Montreal in order to fly the materials to Cuba, unload them, and then return to load some more.

Getting the materials to Cuba was only half the battle, however. Ed Thomson, who served as the liaison between Steelway and the Cuban authorities that were overseeing the project, was informed repeatedly that the date, May 15, would not be changed under any circumstances. Although the materials were now on Cuban soil, getting the building erected on time appeared to be an impossible task. The builder Steelway was working with locally told Ed that there was no way he could possibly sod the required three acres on the property with the workforce available to him. When the Cuban

general in charge of the project asked what exactly he needed in order to make it happen, the flustered builder responded, "I don't know. Maybe 1,000 men." To the builder and everybody else's surprise, a line of busses arrived at the construction site only a short time later. Soldiers equipped with rakes and shovels exited and instantly got to work. With the help of the Cuban army, the sod was laid and Steelway met the deadline. The Cubans were pleased, Fidel Castro cut the ribbon as planned and Steelway had demonstrated once more how far Glen's willingness to take on the most challenging projects and the Steelway team's creative approach could take a company from small-town Springwater.

In 1997, Steelway buildings were used in the construction of airport terminals in Havana and Varadero. As far as special projects go, the one in Havana was particularly remarkable from an engineering point of view. The columns holding the structure were made out of huge round steel tubes with every column being a different length. The unusual shape of the columns required the welders to weld them out of position. To this day, the project stands out as one of the more unique endeavours the company has ever undertaken.

One of many trucks with parts for the Havana, Cuba Airport building is leaving the Steelway plant in 1997.



The challenging nature of the buildings in Cuba, and Steelway's ability to complete these projects in spite of their unique specifications, created a deep sense of accomplishment among Steelway employees. As Rob Collins remembers, there was a feeling that as a team, Steelway could do anything, and the only question was "what's the next challenge?"

That challenge came a few years later, in 1999, when Steelway once again returned to the Caribbean islands. This time, Steelway was tasked with designing a 258-foot-wide, 750-foot-long and 130-foot-high bulk storage building with a total size of 200,000 square feet to be used by Coastal Refineries in Aruba for holding 400,000 tons of coke, a by-product of the oil refining industry. With a clear span of over 250 feet from column to column, it was the largest width Steelway had ever created, even surpassing the 240-foot span of an aircraft hangar at the Toronto International Airport that Steelway had supplied the previous year with a capacity to house an A 320 Airbus or two 757 Jets. The Aruba building was a project of gigantic proportions with over one million pounds of structural material used in manufacturing it. After the building arrived at its destination it took five cranes to lift each of the 23 main frame sections. A newspaper article detailing the project concluded that the Aruba storage facility was equal to 10 community arenas in area and 30 arenas in volume.<sup>16</sup>

The massive 130-foot tall building in Aruba under construction in 1999.





From a manufacturing perspective, all of the building's components had to be hot-dip galvanized to protect the material against the corrosive nature of the coastal environment. Moving the product was a challenge as well, because everything needed to be designed to fit into 40 shipping containers. "It was a big project to ship," Harley Venables recalls. Eventually, due to the sheer number of components required, the number of containers rose to 60. "A big part of the experience was that we learned a lot about shipping large buildings in shipping containers and we learned about hot-dip galvanizing our building components," says Rob Collins. It was a learning experience that gave Steelway the knowledge and the tools to take on larger and ever-more complex projects in the future.

### A Family Business

As the company went through its largest growth period during the 1990s, Glen maintained his personal style and approach to Steelway as a family business. This meant personally introducing himself to each and every new employee and further maintaining his routine of walking through the plant at 8 o'clock in the morning to say "hello" to everyone and get a sense for what was happening on the plant floor. Denis Therrien remembers: "He always asked

about your family. One time, I was loading trucks and he sat me down and said, 'I want to talk to you.' All he wanted was to hear what was going on in my life and whether I was happy."

Glen's distinct approach to operating Steelway as a family business included the notion of giving people second and third chances. "He was always very conscious that providing a job for somebody meant he was in fact supporting their family," says Pat. "He felt that was a serious responsibility." Bryan Hernandez concurs: "Glen was not someone to burn bridges easily." This included mentoring employees through difficult situations, as Kevin Gough remembers: "With the personal issues I had in my life, he not only grabbed on to me as you would do as a Dad for your kids, but as if he was a coach that wanted to keep you on the winning team even if you weren't winning. If that meant grabbing you by the shirt and shaking you up a little bit, he did that."

Working with people and making sure that they got satisfaction out of their employment included providing opportunities for personal and professional growth. Steelway employees were encouraged to move within the company, pursue training, attend courses and become certified in their trades.

### Having Fun Together

Having fun together has been another key part of the overall Steelway culture, both at work and through social events. Long-time employees share memories of many Halloween and Christmas parties, monthly barbecues, company picnics and excursions. "We had a lot of fun over the years with our Christmas parties and other events like picnics, bus trips to the zoo or when we went to the African Lion Safari in 1999. It wasn't just a plant, it was family," Joyce Matthews, who was involved in organizing many company events, reflects. The children and adults playing tug of war with an elephant at the African Lion Safari was a fun experience remembered by many. So is the senior management team serving the annual Christmas dinner to Steelway employees one year while being dressing in elf costumes and singing a Christmas carol. One year, when Santa did not show up for the children's Christmas party in Aylmer, Joyce simply assigned Glen that role. "He was having such a wonderful time with the kids that we didn't miss Santa Clause at all that year," she remembers.

Opposite page left to right: (1) Glen and Pat celebrate 20 years in business in 1996. (2) Glen with Steelway employees in 1996. (3) Playing tug of war with the elephant at the African Lion Safari.



## Keeping People on Their Toes

If there was one thing Glen despised, it was complacency. As an entrepreneur who was ultimately responsible for the long-term success of his company, he wanted everybody to be on their toes. For employees in the plant this was meant literally as Glen would not allow them to sit down during work. Harley Venables reflects: "You were never allowed to sit, ever. There were no chairs allowed on the floor. If he saw one, it would be gone immediately."

The same way that Glen built true relationships with his employees yet kept them motivated and moving at the same time, he also defined his relationship with suppliers. As the sales representative of a welding supply company, Bill Hilton, by his own account, was supplying 95 percent of Steelway's welding gases when his company took on distribution of a new product line that allowed him to bid for the remaining five percent of Steelway's business. Confidently, he met with Glen and asked him for the additional business. To his great surprise, Glen turned him down immediately, saying: "Bill, if I give you that you will have 100 percent of the business and that's not going to happen. If you want this piece, you are going to have to give up something else." "What he was telling me was he was always going to have someone there on my heels," says Bill. "To keep me aware there is competition."



**“ The builders that we have are extremely important to us. They are our core business. They are who got us to where we are today. ”**

- Ed Thomson

## Growing the Steelway Builder Network

Both in Canada and internationally, the Steelway Builder Network was key to bringing many exciting projects to Steelway. Typically, a builder presented a client's project to Steelway and Steelway then designed, engineered and manufactured the structure and shipped it to the building site where the builder would erect the building. With most of Steelway's ongoing relationships with builders going back to the 1980s and 1990s, Glen always saw affiliated builders as key contributors to the long-term success of Steelway.

To engage with builders in the network regularly, Steelway began hosting annual national builder meetings as a forum for builders and Steelway employees to get together to exchange experiences, discuss new trends and learn about new developments at Steelway and in the industry at large. One of the earliest of these meetings was held in Hamilton in 1993, where former CFL-star and professional wrestler Angelo Mosca was the guest speaker. Since then, Steelway has hosted many annual builder meetings in various locations in Canada, as well

as in Mexico, Florida, Cuba, Jamaica, and the Dominican Republic. To this day, builder meetings allow builders and Steelway employees to get to know each other on a personal level. In that, they are a reflection of the people-centered approach to business that was at the core of Glen's business philosophy. Ed Thomson summarizes the importance of the relationship between Steelway and its builder partners: "The builders that we have are extremely important to us. They are our core business. They are who got us to where we are today."

Darell Morris of Spantech, who has distributed Steelway buildings since 1991, attributes Steelway's strong relationships with affiliated builders to the fact that from early on Steelway extended the notion of family to builders in the network. He remembers one particular instance in the 1990s when he received a call on a Saturday from a contractor who had purchased a Steelway building from Spantech. The builder and his work crew were working

on-site installing cranes when they realized that they were missing a critical part of the building. Darell called Glen's brother Fred at home and the two agreed to meet at the plant. Darell drove to Springwater, Fred opened the plant and got him the parts he needed. Darell was able to drop the parts off at the construction site within a matter of hours. "What other companies can you do that with—just call them and say, 'listen, I need parts' and they open the plant and get you the parts? That's just the way they are. That's what makes Steelway different. Steelway is a family venture and builders are part of the family."





## Industry Matters: Joining the Canadian Sheet Steel Building Institute (CSSBI)

As the leader of a company that worked primarily with steel and competed in a market defined by the presence of multiple players, both in Canada and the U.S., Glen was always aware of the larger issues and the changing conditions of the market Steelway was operating in. Whether it was the exchange rate of the Canadian dollar, changes in building codes, the impact of NAFTA, which came into effect on January 1, 1994, the resulting activities of larger U.S. players in the Canadian market, the struggles Canadian steel producers were experiencing, or the need to set national Canadian standards for the use of light gauge steel in buildings—Glen knew that to be a true leader in the industry he needed to make his voice heard on matters affecting manufacturers of steel buildings at large.

To help shape the conditions of the market, Glen became involved in the Canadian Sheet Steel Building Institute. Founded in 1961, the Institute, commonly called the CSSBI, is a national association of companies in the structural sheet steel industry. With manufacturers of lightweight steel cladding, steel building products and systems, commercial and residential steel roofing and lightweight steel framing among its members, the CSSBI represents a cross-section of companies working with structural sheet steel in a variety of disciplines.

Glen strongly believed in the mission of the CSSBI and when he became involved, he was ready to take on an active role in the organization. In 1992, he was first elected president and in that capacity represented the entire industry. Re-elected in 1993, he continued to serve the organization as a Board member throughout the 1990s and 2000s, serving yet another term as president in 2005. As Ron Danielson, who had known Glen since the 1970s

and worked with him on the CSSBI board, remembers: “When Glen made the decision to join the CSSBI, he went into it wholeheartedly, and he put in a tremendous amount of support.” Glen’s tenure as president was characterized by his eagerness to protect the Canadian industry. Both as a regular member and as president, Glen always heavily promoted the notion of “Buying Canadian.” Industry representatives such as Ron Danielson, Steve Fox, Jim Urquhart and Byron Nelson, who knew Glen well through their joint work in CSSBI, remember Glen coming into meetings and putting a Canadian flag on the table in front of him. Following that statement, he would then adamantly push the idea that in order to strengthen the CSSBI and the Canadian industry as a whole it was crucial to buy from Canadian manufacturers.

In his involvement with the CSSBI, Glen was always able to look beyond the fact that he was sharing information about Steelway with executives from companies that were

technically his competitors. Jim Urquhart remembers Glen always reminding everybody at CSSBI that their true competitors were the manufacturers and users of concrete, wood, and other building materials. As long as they remained united in the interests of steel manufacturing, they would all prosper. Competition, in Glen’s mind, was a good thing, and there was no shame in sharing information. Competition drove innovation, and made the industry as a whole better for everyone involved. Ron Danielson notes that he was deeply inspired by Glen’s philosophy of sharing. “Glen certainly helped me with my philosophy about knowing your competitors well. He was a very strong proponent of that, and he and I became very close friends even though we were competitors. We were good competitors and we shared lots of information. He was very open to inviting me to go to his plant and see all the things he did there.”

## The Second Generation: Jason & Bryan White

Growing up as they did in and around the plant, Jason and Bryan White were such a part of life at Steelway that it was not a surprise that they chose to join their parents’ company full-time when they got older. In fact, as Jason reflects, he never really considered doing anything else: “I never thought of it as joining the business as my parents had always involved us boys in the company and the decisions that were made along the way. Maybe in retrospect, it would have been nice to do something different first, but no, I have never actually contemplated working outside of the family business.”

As they moved through their teens in the 1990s, there was ample opportunity for

the boys to become more involved. Jason’s first job was in the cladding area, mostly because it was a little safer and easier for a teenager to work there than in other parts of the plant. Bryan, too, began his tenure at Steelway in the cladding and trim areas. They received no special treatment for being Glen and Pat’s children; they came in, did the work that was expected of them and were held to the same standards of quality and expectation that everyone else was. “We were very much regular employees,” Bryan states.

Their early jobs entailed cleaning up corners in the shop that got neglected and doing general maintenance that the other employees didn’t have the time for. Long-time Steelway employee Barry Hill remembers the boys coming in on weekends, digging sludge out of some corner because it was a job no one else would do. It may not have been glamorous, but it was a start. “It was simple,” Jason states. “They just threw us in there and we helped right away, and when we were done for the summer, we went back to school.”

As they got older, their responsibilities increased. Jason, who had a long-time infatuation with trucks, immediately went out and wrote his AZ license on the day he turned 18, which would allow him to drive one the company trucks every so often. Although he would continue to take on whatever tasks were assigned to him in the plant, getting the licence was his way of bringing his own passions into the business and finding a niche for himself that he truly loved. Furthermore, both boys enjoyed working with computers, as technology came to them easily. Jason learned as much as he could, absorbing as much information about networking and computer technology as possible.

As a result, when the new MIS software was purchased in 1994, Jason was in charge of sourcing, installing and the ongoing maintenance of the new computer network. However, this was a duty that his younger brother would soon inherit, as Jason became focused on facility management, responsible for building additions and commissioning the machinery. From the mid-1990s, he worked closely with his father designing and building new machines. “Dad would come up with crazy ideas, we would figure out how to make it work from a technology point of view, and I would be responsible for making it all happen,” Jason reflects.

Computers were very much Bryan’s passion and what defined his early trajectory in the business. Having done some software development in high school, he quickly began applying his information technology skills to processes at Steelway. Bryan wrote and installed software programs for several of the machines that were part of the lines Glen and his team were building in the plant. “I remember doing some software development work in late high school. In the mid-1990s, the first thing I did was work on the software side of the flange line that we built ourselves,” he recalls. “It was the first sort of linking between our drafting department and the manufacturing process.” Bryan ended up writing the middle-ware for several machines over the course of the 90s.

Bryan’s passion and natural aptitude for programming and working with computers complemented Jason’s interest in the more hands-on, facility management aspects of the business. It was a dichotomy that suited the brothers very well, as it allowed them to focus their efforts on different areas of the company and keep developing skill sets



that supported each other. In that, they set the stage for the model of shared responsibility that continues to define their roles as co-presidents of Steelway today.

As far as schooling went, it was a mixed bag for the two of them. Jason, by his own admission, didn't care for school too much, preferring instead to work in the family business. He did very much the same thing his father had done, and took as many courses as he could that would flesh out his technical prowess, such as machine shop, automotive, drafting and electronics. "I always enjoyed that kind of work during high school," he says.

Another thing that influenced Jason's educational background was that he really enjoyed accounting, and took a number of accounting and business courses in high school. He did well in them and decided that his best course of action beyond high school would be to take a college business program. Jason applied to Lambton College in Sarnia, Ontario and two years later, graduated with a business diploma. Looking back, he is surprised at how quickly the entire process went. "If I had realized how

much I enjoyed learning about things that actually interested me, I probably would have studied for a bit longer," he says. "It went by really quickly. The fact that I was still working part-time at Steelway on weekends really added to it."

Bryan, on the other hand, was more of the academic type, enjoying a lot of the math and science courses during his time in high school. He was tailor-made to be an engineer, favouring mechanical applications for problem solving through his understanding of science and technology. Bryan wanted to study mechanical engineering but was only accepted into civil engineering at the University of Waterloo. As part of the program, he worked in a number of co-op placements, but felt somewhat out of place when working outside the family business. Much like Jason, Bryan felt a strong pull to join Steelway full-time, which was reinforced by the sense that things were passing him by while he was away. Still, studying engineering was a great experience for him, and it certainly equipped him with the necessary knowledge and skills he continues to use today in co-leading Steelway with his brother.

## Being Part of the Community

In regards to the company's relationship with the community, the 1990s were a decade that solidified Steelway's commitment through fundraisers for local charities and involvement in special events and organizations that made a change locally and beyond. In 1997, Steelway participated in its first St. Thomas Corporate Challenge, a team building event in which teams representing different companies from the area competed against one another while raising money for charity. Organizations supported through donations included East Elgin Support Services which coordinates support and training for people with developmental challenges, among others. Company participation in the Heart and Stroke Foundation's Big Bike event started in the 1990s and quickly developed into a team building exercise that Steelway employees look forward to every year.

Steelway employees remember fundraising efforts and involvement in the community not only for the impact they created, but also for the fun everybody had in the process. Whether it was employees

having their heads shaved in support of cancer research or dunking Glen and other members of the management team in the dunk tank to raise money for a valuable cause—events like these have been the building blocks of a company culture that continues to be defined by sharing with the community and having fun as a team at the same time.

The local food banks in particular have been close to the heart of Steelway employees, the White family and the company at large. Annual charity drives for the Aylmer Corner Cupboard and the St. Thomas Caring Cupboard food banks presented the opportunity to assist people less fortunate in meeting their needs. As members of a local community that has seen significant challenges over the years, being able to reach out and make a difference in peoples' lives generates a great deal of collective effort at Steelway. Kevin Gough, a Steelway employee since 1987, points to the genuine character of community support as a core part of the Steelway culture. "I take a lot of pride in saying I work for this company and this is what we do for the community," he says.



The Vaughan Soccer Centre after completion in 1997. Opposite page left: The main frame rafters for the Vaughan Soccer Centre are being welded in the Aylmer plant in 1997. Opposite page right: Aerial view of the Steelway plant in the mid-1990s.

In addition to participating in charity drives and fundraisers, in 1998, the Steelway team mentored a Junior Achievement group in Aylmer. Nine students from East Elgin Secondary School were chosen to work with professionals associated with local Aylmer businesses—including Jason and Bryan White. As part of the program, students learned how to set up a business, produce and market a product and deliver it to their customers.

### Celebrating 20 Years of Excellence

On November 8, 1996, Steelway celebrated its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary with an open house attended by over 300 people. It was a time to reflect on how far the company had come and to define the vision for the future. Since its founding in 1976, Steelway had gone through two recessions and experienced exponential growth that had seen its market expand way beyond the 100-mile radius around Aylmer that Glen had initially envisioned. Over the course of two decades, Steelway had matured into the position as an industry leader for steel building systems in Canada. The small outfit that Glen and Pat had started in their backyard had turned into a considerably-sized

company that was heavily involved in the local community and helped steer the way for the steel building manufacturing industry in Canada as a whole.

In a message written by Glen to his employees, printed in the July 1996 edition of the Steelway News, he toasted the success of not only the company, but everyone who had contributed to it in their various roles. In a letter to the industry, the company and Steelway employees, Glen pledged to approach the next 20 years just as passionately and with an eye to continuous growth as the previous two decades. He outlined his plans for further plant expansions, new equipment purchases, and more automated manufacturing processes. "It is with great enthusiasm we look forward to new products, new manufacturing processes and new customers, as well as seeing our past customers again," he wrote.<sup>17</sup> It would be that wave of enthusiasm, combined with the conviction that Steelway could achieve great things that would carry Glen, Steelway employees and the company into the new millennium.



### Looking Ahead

Confidence in the future of Steelway, as expressed by Glen during the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations, was well founded. By the end of the 1990s, Steelway had the most extensive product line in the industry. Industry firsts such as the use of powder coating technology in the painting of purlins that had started in 1997, as well as CSA A660 certification and ISO 9001 registration had reinforced the company's position as the leading steel building systems manufacturer in Canada. A series of plant expansions had brought the total square footage of the Springwater plant to 100,000 square feet. Milestone projects of proportions that would have been unthinkable only a few years earlier had further helped the company in defining its true identity as a custom building solutions provider rather than just being a manufacturer of steel building systems.

As the 20<sup>th</sup> century drew to a close, Steelway's sales were close to \$35 million and the company was producing 360 buildings per year. With 1999 being yet another record year, Steelway approached the new Millennium with a level of expertise and sense of community hard to be matched by any of its competitors. Glen was right in attributing the strength of Steelway that would carry it into the 21<sup>st</sup> century to the determination and efforts of the company as a whole. "The increases are not due to an improving marketplace. They are due to our better presence in the market," he said.<sup>18</sup>





TRANSITIONS

05



## Celebrating 25 Years in Business

2001 marked the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of Steelway. Family, employees, builders, customers, suppliers, as well as community representatives attended the open house event on Thursday, November 22, 2001. Part of the celebrations was the ribbon-cutting ceremony for Steelway's new 40,000 square foot plant expansion, the largest addition in the history of the plant. Undertaken at an investment of \$3.5 million, it included five cranes, a complete 3-plate line, a weld shop and a paint booth. The mayor of Central Elgin, Dave Rock, saluted his municipality's "largest single industry," emphasizing the example Steelway had set for the entire region.<sup>19</sup>

To mark the event, Glen and Pat had commissioned artist Peter Robson to produce a painting that would bring attention to the significance of Springwater in the historical development of the larger community, to honour the White family's contributions across generations and to recognize Steelway's deep roots in the local community. "I was looking for a project to mark the occasion of our business's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary and for a tribute to my father, and, if possible, to do something for the community as well," Glen shared in an interview with the Times-Journal.<sup>20</sup> He had found his inspiration for the painting while driving by the old pond in Springwater one day. "I was driving along one day near the pond and it came to me to commission a painting to depict what the area looked like 100 years ago."<sup>21</sup> An old photo from the Whites' family album was used by the artist to create a rendition of Springwater at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As a special tribute to Glen's great uncle Fred White, the naturalist who had so deeply cared about the pond and its surrounding forest, the painting includes an image of Fred sitting on a horse that is drinking water from the pond.

Many of the limited edition prints were presented to employees, builders, suppliers and the community. A special moment during the ceremony was the presentation of a framed print to Leonard Jones, Steelway's very first customer. For his part, Leonard confirmed that the barn that Glen had built a quarter of a century earlier was still in operation and predicted that it would continue to be used on his farm for a very long time. The prints were paired with booklets published and sponsored by Steelway, detailing the history of the Springwater community through historic pictures and text. Both the painting and the pictorial history of Springwater were strong manifestations of the White family and Steelway's deep connection with its heritage in the local community.

A wide-angle photograph of a large industrial facility, likely a steel mill or manufacturing plant. The foreground is dominated by rows of large, cylindrical steel coils stacked on the floor. In the background, there are long, parallel tracks or conveyor systems, and overhead cranes with yellow and blue markings. The ceiling is high with various pipes and lighting fixtures. The overall atmosphere is industrial and brightly lit.

## The Inception of Steelway Material Handling

In 2001, in what turned out to be the first step in a multiple-step process of the company becoming an integrated single-source supplier of both steel buildings and cranes, Steelway began manufacturing single and double girder cranes with a capacity of up to 80 tonnes and spans up to 100 feet under its own brand, Steelway Material Handling (SMH). The decision to focus on cranes was based on the realization that many of Steelway's commercial and industrial buildings were designed with capacity for cranes or lifting devices, yet prior to the launch of SMH customers had to purchase the actual cranes from other manufacturers. Looking at a large unused area in the plant that was the result of the expansion that had been completed a year earlier, Glen immediately saw an opportunity to offer additional value to Steelway customers and, in that process, fill the empty space in the plant. Also on Glen's mind was the aging nature of Steelway's own inventory of cranes used in the manufacturing of buildings, many of which were nearing the end of their useful lives.

Dennis Bak remembers the beginning of crane production as somewhat of an experiment: "We needed a number of cranes for our own plant and I remember Glen saying, 'let's see if we can do it ourselves.' The idea was that if we could do it, then we could build cranes for customers as well." With the help of a former Konecranes employee, whom Glen hired to lead the effort, the first crane built by the new Steelway Material Handling division replaced one of the existing cranes in the plant. "From there, it took off and we started building more and more cranes," remembers Jake Giesbrecht.

Establishing Steelway Material Handling as a division for the manufacturing of cranes was another example of Glen's foresight and determination to keep Steelway ahead of the curve. Manufacturing cranes was a means to offer customers something Steelway's competitors were not able to do—namely an integrated solution consisting of the building and the matching crane customized to the specifications of the building. Marketing material created to promote the new division defined its core value proposition to Steelway customers: "Fit and functionality are ensured by purchasing both your new metal building system and your new material handling products from the same source." Vertical integration promised a greater degree of control over the company's supply chain and new efficiencies through the coordinated

production of the building and its crane at the very same time. "One stop shopping," as Bryan Hernandez puts it, gave Steelway the ability to oversee all aspects of the building project through a streamlined design process that ultimately worked to the benefit of the customer. Bryan explains: "We have all the information in-house and we make sure everything works and the crane is not going to interfere with anything else in the building. But, if the customer buys someone else's crane, then that is not our responsibility. This is something that clearly sets us apart from our competitors."

As Glen and the Steelway team put their joint efforts into learning the ins and outs of building cranes, the division grew at a fast pace. It was a venture that paid off in a large way, laying the foundations for Steelway's ongoing reputation as an all-in-one manufacturer of steel buildings. Most importantly, Glen's decision set in motion a process that has since resulted in the acquisition and integration of a former competitor that specializes in the manufacturing and servicing of complex cranes into the Steelway fold.

### Industry & Community Leadership

With Steelway's standing as a market leader in the steel building industry in Canada and its position as the largest local employer in the Springwater and Aylmer area came recognition. In 2003, Glen's vision, hard work and willingness to take risks to make Steelway a market leader were recognized when he was nominated for the Canadian Entrepreneur of the Year award. Although he was humbled and pleased by this nomination, he immediately made the point that companies and business leaders should not dwell on awards, but focus on the daily tasks at hand. "They have to concentrate on what they are doing today, and what they plan to do in the future."<sup>22</sup> It was a rather typical reaction by a born entrepreneur who had not entered the world of business to earn recognition and awards, but to follow his dream of building things.

## Steelway Building Systems wins Free Enterprise Award

Steelway Building Systems of Springwater received a Free Enterprise Award from St. Thomas and District Chamber of Commerce during a banquet Tuesday night.

The chamber said awards recognize "businesses and individuals who have made significant, all-encompassing contributions within St. Thomas and Central Elgin. "The recipients are those who are proven leaders, as evidenced by their repeated success in endeavours that relate to our economic, social and civil well-being."

Glen White, founder and president of Steelway, which makes pre-fabricated steel buildings, said he was proud to accept the award on behalf of his family and all company

He was pleased to be approached about using and Jason had for many years been innovators in computer automation technology at

Receiving company's was gratifying. He was be included chamber Award win "It's just company ple."

Mr. White started S shop on

It has covers 140,000 square feet, and employs 115.

He said credit for the Free Enterprise Award was shared with his family and workers. He might have been the



Opposite page left to right: (1) Jason, Pat and Glen White receive the St. Thomas and District Chamber Free Enterprise Award 2003 on behalf of Steelway. (2) Pat and Glen White.

“ I may have been the conductor of the orchestra, but many people contributed over the years to Steelway's success. ”

- Glen White

FACE TO WIDE FLANGE BEAM CONNECTION

# Certificate of Registration

This is to certify that QUASAR has registered the Quality Management System of:



Steelway Building Systems  
R.R.#5, 7825 Springwater Road, Aylmer ON N5H 2N4

to the Quality System Standard:

## ISO 9001:2000

Initial Registration: 17 Dec 2004

Issue: 05 May 2005

Date of Expiry: 04 April 2006

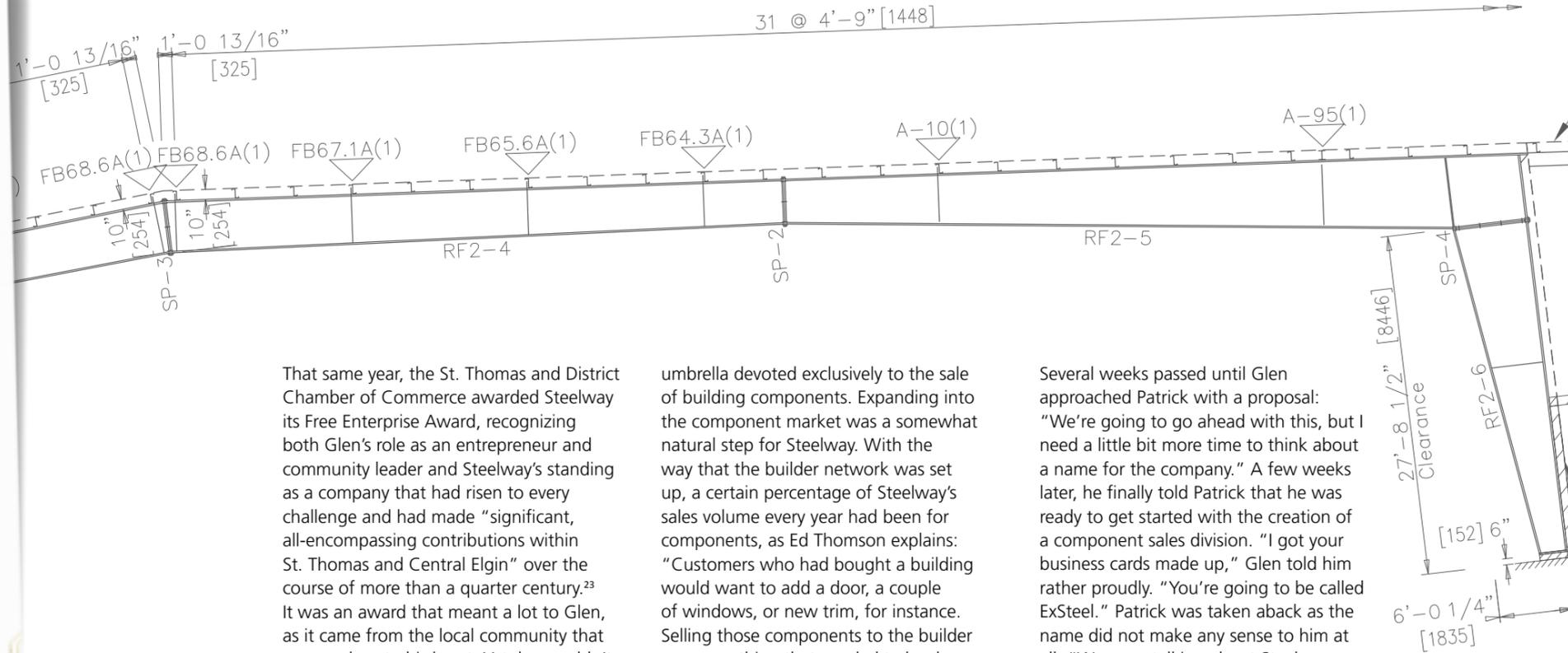
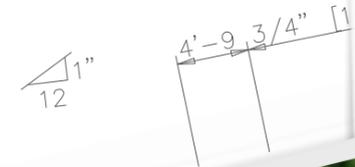
Building Systems and Steel Building Components.

Certificate Number: Q2470



Eng.

Refer to [www.iso.org](http://www.iso.org) for details of certificate holder. Tel: (505) 943-0547, Fax: (505) 943-1318



That same year, the St. Thomas and District Chamber of Commerce awarded Steelway its Free Enterprise Award, recognizing both Glen's role as an entrepreneur and community leader and Steelway's standing as a company that had risen to every challenge and had made "significant, all-encompassing contributions within St. Thomas and Central Elgin" over the course of more than a quarter century.<sup>23</sup> It was an award that meant a lot to Glen, as it came from the local community that was so close to his heart. Yet, he wouldn't be Glen if there was not a reminder that there was more to the success of the company than just him and his own efforts. Glen was quick to make the point that the credit needed to be shared with his family and coworkers. "I may have been the conductor of the orchestra," he said, "but many people contributed over the years to Steelway's success. Without good workers, we don't win the game."<sup>24</sup> It was a sentiment that was at the core of Glen's philosophy and still holds true as a corner piece of Steelway's philosophy today.

umbrella devoted exclusively to the sale of building components. Expanding into the component market was a somewhat natural step for Steelway. With the way that the builder network was set up, a certain percentage of Steelway's sales volume every year had been for components, as Ed Thomson explains: "Customers who had bought a building would want to add a door, a couple of windows, or new trim, for instance. Selling those components to the builder was something that needed to be done by us anyway, so we simply expanded the component side of the business and made it ExSteel."

Several weeks passed until Glen approached Patrick with a proposal: "We're going to go ahead with this, but I need a little bit more time to think about a name for the company." A few weeks later, he finally told Patrick that he was ready to get started with the creation of a component sales division. "I got your business cards made up," Glen told him rather proudly. "You're going to be called ExSteel." Patrick was taken aback as the name did not make any sense to him at all. "We were talking about Steelway Building Components. What in the world is ExSteel?" he asked. "Our first year goal is \$3 million in sales," Glen replied. "If you don't meet that threshold, you are an Ex-Steelway employee." Patrick nodded with determination. "No problem!" he told Glen. "I have nothing to lose!"

The inception of ExSteel had begun when Steelway employee Patrick Grubb sent out faxes over the winter months, circulating as much product information as possible about building components manufactured by Steelway to drum up new business during the company's traditionally quieter time of the year. When he began receiving orders from a multitude of non-Steelway builders, Patrick approached Glen with the suggestion to turn component sales into a more coordinated company effort. To his surprise, Glen shut him down. "You don't want to open this can of worms," he said. "What can of worms am I opening, Glen?" Patrick inquired. "We tried this with someone else and it just didn't work out," was Glen's response. Patrick thought about it for a moment and then told Glen: "Well, you haven't tried it with me."

In its first year after inception, Patrick successfully coordinated ExSteel to produce and sell \$3,030,000 worth of building components. "I never got questioned again!" Patrick says. "Except for maybe a couple of times when I dealt with competitors," he adds with a smile. Building onto its instant success, ExSteel quickly became an integral part of the Steelway organization, providing the evolving group of companies under the Steelway banner with an area for additional growth that had been unrealized before.

## ExSteel Building Components

From its earliest days, Steelway's focus had been on manufacturing buildings. Typically, components were only sold as part of a prefabricated building project. This was to change when ExSteel was created in 2004 as a separate division under the Steelway



206'-7 3/4" [62985]  
Clearance

OUT-TO-OUT OF STEEL



## Facing the Ultimate Challenge— Glen Being Diagnosed with Cancer

2005 began with much promise as operations were in full swing and business was going well. Things were looking great, and Steelway was poised to have yet another good year in the books. There was a multitude of projects in the works, including plant additions and renovations, new equipment purchases and software acquisitions and Steelway would go on to break its sales record once again by the year's end.

In the most striking contrast to how well things were progressing in the business, Glen's personal life was about to take a turn for the worse, deeply impacting everyone involved with Steelway. In March of 2005, he was diagnosed with colon cancer. Having seen his brother Fred lose his life within months from receiving the same diagnosis five years earlier, Glen was certain that he only had three months left to get his affairs in order. Pat remembers coming home on the day Glen had received the diagnosis. "By the time I got home, Glen had written out a whole bunch of instructions, telling me what I should do," she recalls. "In a matter of hours he had all this stuff written out that we needed to take care of."

Glen fought cancer the same way he had built his business by doing research, looking into all available treatment options and doing whatever it took to beat the disease. While Glen was facing the biggest challenge of his life, the management team at Steelway was headed by long-time team members Bryan Hernandez (Sales Manager), Rob Collins (Materials and ExSteel Division Manager), Dennis Bak (VP of Engineering) and Brian Blazey (Controller). Ted Oliver had joined the team as Vice President of Administration two weeks before Glen had learned he had cancer. In 2004 already, Glen had hired a consultant to help coach the management team and Jason and Bryan to be more independent, a task that "was very successfully accomplished," as Glen communicated in a letter to builder Jean (John) Desjardins of J.C. Steel Buildings on April 5, 2005.

Glen's thoughtful approach during this most difficult period allowed his sons, Jason and Bryan, to rely on the management team and to keep growing in their respective areas of responsibility, while at the same time, not pushing them into taking over the company. By having a core group of experienced managers that could operate independently, Glen felt further assured that they would keep managing things in the event that the White family—with or without him—decided not to continue to operate Steelway themselves.

Glen, Bryan and Jason White in front of a test fixture designed and manufactured by Steelway and donated to the University of Waterloo in 2003.

## Transitioning Steelway into the Second Generation

Given their trajectory and commitment to the family business, there could be little doubt that Jason and Bryan were determined to eventually take over the business despite Glen's insistence that he wouldn't force Steelway on them. Both brothers had joined the company full-time after finishing their education and by the time Glen was forced to withdraw they both held managerial positions. In their respective roles as Facility Manager and Production Manager, Jason and Bryan had a fair share of responsibility in overseeing the day-to-day operations of the company.

When Glen was diagnosed with cancer, he instantly walked away from the business. While focusing on his health, he remained quietly in the background and limited his role to that of a mentor to his sons. At the same time, he moved Jason and Bryan into more senior roles that revolved around truly running the company. To that end, Jason became Steelway's Vice President, and Bryan became the Vice President of Operations. Bryan's job didn't change much—though he did have a greater focus on facility-type matters—while his brother Jason took on a lot of Glen's previous responsibilities. "I helped fill the gaps in the management team, basically did whatever Dad had done prior. If someone phoned and wanted to speak to Glen, they got me instead," Jason recalls.

Even prior to being diagnosed with cancer, Glen had started to spend a considerable amount of time away from Steelway. In 2004, he had begun building a new house for Pat and himself and during that time had taken a step back from the day-to-

day operations of the company. "As soon as he started building, he became very distracted from the business. He would come in irregularly and then he was gone again. People at Steelway knew him for being around 24/7, so this was a really new experience for everyone. At that time, I was a year or so out of school and struggling to find my role and finding out what I could do autonomously and what I could do only with him," Bryan reflects.

Getting himself involved in the intricate details of designing and building a replica of a Victorian farm house was Glen's way of striking a balance between his work and personal life and pursuing his life-long passion for building. During construction, he could often be found operating heavy equipment, the bulldozer in particular, something he found particularly enjoyable and relaxing. He may not have had any intentions of completely retiring at the time, but in fact had already started shifting responsibilities onto the management staff, including his sons.

While Glen removed himself from the business more and more, employees started wondering what would happen to Steelway, and whether the company would be sold or keep moving forward as a family business. "This was a pretty traumatic time for a lot of people," Pat remembers. Rob Collins, who was part of the leadership team at this crucial time, concurs: "Even though the eventual transition from Glen to Jason and Bryan was smooth, there was quite a bit of discussion during the time before: What is going to become of the business? Are customers going to continue to buy from us if Glen is not here anymore? Are Bryan and Jason going to take over? Some of the senior guys, I believe, were concerned whether we would survive as a company or not. That spirit was very real."

Within weeks of being diagnosed with cancer, Glen received offers from multiple companies interested in buying Steelway. Convinced that he had only three months to live, he weighed his options. As a hard-core entrepreneur he was all too aware of the commitment and time it had taken to build the business—time he had not spent with his family. For his entire life he had struggled with finding the right balance between work and his personal life. Clearly, in this most difficult situation, the business had become a burden to Glen, so much so that he came to the decision to sell it. Jason remembers his father telling him of his decision rather matter-of-factly: "I stopped by to check on Dad and he was out on his bulldozer working around the house. I went over to him and he stopped and said to me, 'I have decided we are going to sell the business.'" Reflecting on what must have been the most difficult decision in Glen's life, Jason softly adds: "I was an absolute mess. This was the first time he had ever made a decision of this magnitude without discussing it first as a family. I was hurt. I was angry. We were yelling at each other. I left that conversation in tears." Very few people understand how close this story came to having an alternate ending. Jason has shared this important story and the emotional roller coaster that accompanied it with many other family business owners since then. As Jason stresses: "Bryan and I had thought we were all on the same page and look how quickly things had changed. Because of Dad's diagnosis, his whole outlook on life and our family business changed overnight."

Pat was initially in full support of selling the business as she didn't want to leave what she perceived as "the burden of running the company" to her children either when it had occupied so much of her husband's life. She completely changed

her mind, however, when she saw how passionate Bryan and Jason were about carrying on their parents' legacy. "I would have given anything to sell Steelway at one point, but once Glen was sick and Jason and Bryan started to run the company and I could see that they really wanted it, I didn't want it to be sold," she says. "I kept looking at Glen, telling him, 'The boys want to do it.'"

Having grown up in and around the plant, with strong personal relationships with Steelway employees and considerable experience from working in various parts of the business since their school days, Bryan and Jason were ready to take on the leadership of the company. "I have always wanted to work here," says Jason, indicating that this was a decision he had made long ago. Bryan echoes his older brother. "For me it was never really a question of whether it was going to be for the long run," says Bryan. "I never felt forced into it, or forced into taking it over. It was just my destiny or fate, without any pressure to actually be involved with it." It's a feeling shared by both of them, and one they carry with them to work every day.

The final shift from Glen to his sons was a gradual process, despite its acceleration due to Glen's illness. Jason and Bryan purchased the company and became Steelway's legal operators shortly before their father's passing.

## Losing Glen

In the midst of all of this, and in line with Glen's wish for things in the business to move ahead as planned, Steelway scheduled its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration for late November 2006. Just 10 days before the planned open house, Glen passed away, on November 13, 2006, at the age of 61. In what was perhaps one of the most touching tributes to the company's founder, the Aylmer Express quoted his family as saying that "Glen believed that a true measure of success is not how much money you make, but the contribution you have made to your community. Glen was an incredibly successful man."<sup>25</sup>

## Honouring Glen's Legacy

In a nod to everything that Glen had accomplished during his life, he posthumously received the Award of Recognition from the CSSBI (in 2006) and the St. Thomas District Chamber of Commerce Chair Award (in 2007). Bestowing its highest honour on Glen was the Chamber's way "of saying thanks to Glen for his work with us at a level that is above and beyond the norm. For all the meetings, the phone calls, the energy, and the dedication, our gratitude is endless."<sup>26</sup> In receiving the award, Glen became the first person in the history of the St. Thomas District Chamber to receive all three of the Chamber's awards, having previously received the Free Enterprise Merit Award in 1990, and the Free Enterprise Master award in 2003. The awards are testaments to Glen's legacy as an exceptional business and community leader with a passion for Steelway and a deep love of his community.

## Moving Ahead

Throughout the transition, Steelway continued the large capital expenditure campaign it had embarked on and that included renovations to the facility, the creation of more office space and the purchase and installation of a Ficep beam drill line in 2006. When diagnosed with cancer it had been Glen's wish to keep investing into the future of the company. In a letter to builder John Desjardin that he wrote in April of 2005, Glen had made it a point to emphasize that all projects that were currently underway would keep moving ahead as planned.

The facility overhaul included a complete renovation and expansion of the lunch room, a new men's locker room, a women's washroom with its own lockers, and a new first-aid room. Jason pointed out in a newspaper article at the time that "health, safety and morale, not just the machinery, are important components in the work life of Steelway employees."<sup>27</sup> An office addition above the training room further resulted in the creation of four new offices, six cubicles, and a new library to house catalogues and other resources.

**"Health, safety and morale, not just the machinery, are important components in the work life of Steelway employees."**

- Jason White



The Ficep beam drill line was a key piece of equipment which added significantly to Steelway's capabilities. A large automated machine that drills holes into a steel beam as its runs through the machine, the Ficep line ended up solving a multitude of challenges employees on the plant floor had experienced. Prior to the Ficep line, the process included cutting the beam to length with a saw and clearing off any rust that might have accumulated in a booth with a wire wheel. Following that first step, another employee had to lay out all of the holes that were to be drilled using a tape measure before pre-punching them and in yet another step finalizing the holes with a hanging punch. "It took about 40 minutes to do one beam, and that's before it goes out to the welder. The Ficep line took all the manual labour out of this process and it was far more accurate," Harley Venables explains. The increased efficiency of the new line eliminated both the manual punch and the wire wheel booth while its superior level of accuracy through automation resulted in less wastage of steel.

### Steelway Marks 30 Years in Business

Coming shortly after Glen's passing, the open house on November 23, 2006 turned out to be a celebration of the legacy of Steelway's founder. It was attended by an estimated 800 people and included guided tours of the newly expanded facility. Furthermore, it was a demonstration of the company's continuous strong ties with the community and an assurance by the second generation of White family entrepreneurs that Steelway would keep looking towards the future while honouring its past.

In his address, Bryan emphasized that the management team and the entire staff at Steelway were prepared to meet the challenges created by the tragic loss of Glen head-on and to keep growing the company while maintaining the values it had been built on by its founder. In regards to his own and his brother Jason's shared new roles as leaders of the company he said: "It doesn't take long to realize that Glen has left us with really big shoes to fill, of which the soles are probably worn out because he was too frugal to replace them. However, these shoes will be easier to fill when we each only have to take one. Jason and I complement each other's strengths and weaknesses, and we have both grown up in this family business."<sup>28</sup>



Steelway Open House on November 23, 2006.

**“ It doesn't take long to realize that Glen has left us with really big shoes to fill, of which the soles are probably worn out because he was too frugal to replace them. ”**

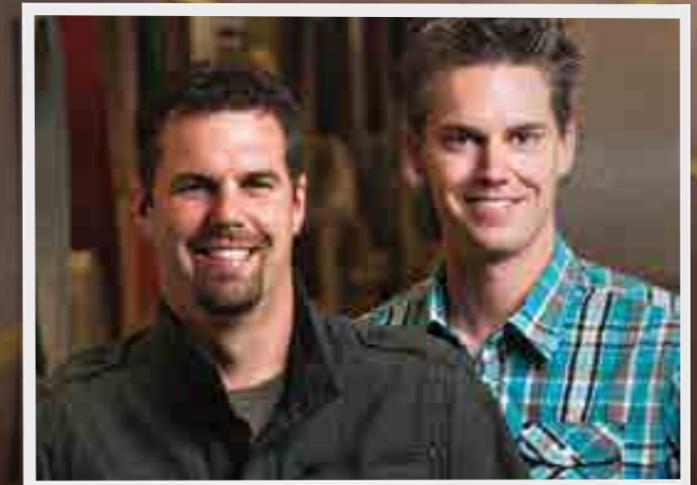
**- Bryan and Jason White**



### Joint Leadership

Although they both knew that a decision would have to be made eventually, neither Jason nor Bryan really embraced the idea of taking on the title of president following their Dad's passing. Rather than changing the system that was already in place, the brothers initially maintained the status quo and relied on their experienced management team to help them get their bearings. "We sort of dragged our feet a little bit on the title changes," Bryan remembers.

According to Jason, their hesitancy in regards to reassigning the role of president was an issue of sensitivity, and they weren't exactly certain how to proceed with it. It was as much a time for Jason and Bryan to find their new identity in the company as it was a time for Steelway to redefine its identity without Glen at the helm. Ultimately, like everything else in the history of Steelway, it was "just" another challenge and like all other challenges, it was one they would eventually overcome.



Jason and Bryan White.



It was in 2007 that Jason and Bryan decided to take on the formal title of co-presidents. Although this was a fairly new concept that was not far spread in the business community at the time, it seemed the best possible option for the brothers to manifest that they were equal partners in their joint leadership role at Steelway. Adopting the title of co-presidents further served as a reminder that there was continuity in leadership and values. When the brothers officially took the helm, their sensitive approach to leadership had eased any uncertainties that had arisen and created the conditions for a smooth completion of the switchover from the employees' perspective as well. "It was a very easy transition to support," says Rob Collins, pointing to the fact that Bryan and Jason worked closely with the leadership team without making large changes to the overall course of the company. For Brian Vernaleken, it was the overall evolutionary character of the transition in spite of the sudden loss of the company's charismatic founder that gave employees great confidence in the future of Steelway during what otherwise would have been highly uncertain times. "There was very

The Steelway Family in front of the Springwater plant in 2007.

little change in the transition and things still seem to be evolving. I might have been a little worried initially, but my worries were quickly put aside," he asserts.

At an organizational level, Bryan and Jason have divided up their roles based on what they describe as an "internal vs. external" division. Focusing on internal operations, Bryan looks after production, the engineering and drafting departments, as well as facility management and IT. The departments that are external in nature, those whose day-to-day operations have an outward focus, including purchasing, sales, marketing, and customer service, as well as accounting are being looked after by Jason. The brothers always joke that they drew straws to decide who was to be responsible for accounting and Jason lost. Dividing up responsibilities that way enables the brothers to make important decisions together while at the same time staying focused on their respective area of responsibility in day-to-day operations.

## Steelway Building Systems named family enterprise of the year



Top left: The new Aylmer plant completed in 2007.  
Bottom: Breaking the ground for the new Aylmer plant on August 2, 2007.

## New Building on Progress Drive in Aylmer

In 2007, in a move that mirrored Glen's decision in the 1980s to house the Sunhut division in a separate facility in Aylmer, Steelway opened a second, smaller plant at 60 Progress Drive in Aylmer to accommodate a production line that would operate semi-independently from the main plant. Realizing the growing popularity of ExSteel as a brand of quality building products, Jason and Bryan had decided to add a line for the manufacturing of roof and composite deck components to be sold under the ExSteel name. By chance, a used roll forming line became available on the local market, which could be used to streamline the process. Although the machine needed some work, it provided a great entry point into the roof and composite deck market. Growing the company on the ExSteel side made a lot of sense as, in the words of Bryan, "ExSteel was becoming a brand that we could leverage."



In 2007, Steelway employee John Hart unexpectedly passed away during the Steelway Golf Tournament. He had joined the company in August of 1985 as a machine operator before moving into a plant supervisor role some years later. At the time of his passing he was involved in production scheduling. He was also actively involved in the Steelway Social Committee. His sudden loss came as a shock to the entire Steelway community.



Rather than purchasing an existing building, Steelway built a new facility to its own specifications on 3.3 acres of land in the Aylmer Business Park. The initial phase included the construction of a 12,000 square foot facility, as well as 1,250 square feet of office space, at a total investment of \$2 million. The ground at the site was officially broken in early August of 2007, in a ceremony that involved then Aylmer mayor, Bob Habkirk.

From the town's perspective, Steelway's move back to Aylmer could not have come at a better time. The Imperial Tobacco plant that had provided steady employment to hundreds of area residents had just shut down after 50 years of operations. Town officials welcomed the new Steelway plant as an investment into the community that would hopefully bring some much needed economic stimulus to a town that had traditionally prospered through its important role in the tobacco trade. Jason, when interviewed by the local

newspaper, expressed his confidence that Steelway's initiative might spark other companies to follow suit.<sup>29</sup> Today, the building on Progress Drive is home to two roll forming lines, producing the VersaSeal, DiamondSeal, StrucSeal, RD156, and CD156 products.

## The Great Recession and its Impact on Steelway

In December 2007, problems in the U.S. subprime mortgage market led to the busting of an \$8 trillion housing bubble, marking the beginning of the Great Recession—the single-largest global economic crisis since the Great Depression of the 1930s. People losing their homes in the U.S., sharp cutbacks in consumer spending, financial market chaos resulting in a full-blown financial and banking crisis, and massive job losses were manifestations of a drawn-out recession that would last until 2010 and that was felt in Canada as well.

As a North American manufacturer, Steelway was not immune to the challenges caused by the recession. 2008 turned out to be another record year in spite of tighter margins in an increasingly tense market environment. In 2009, benefitting in part from the government's economic stimulus program, Steelway was able to remain profitable, and even in 2010, its worst year during the recession and one that saw many manufacturing businesses in Canada close their doors forever, the company stayed in the black with a very modest profit.

Faced with worse economic conditions at home than in Canada, one way Steelway's American competitors reacted to the recession was by "dumping" steel products north of their border, making it more difficult for Canadian manufacturers like Steelway to maintain their market position. With more players in the Canadian market and U.S. companies benefitting from the Canadian dollar being par with the U.S. dollar, sales volume went down and profit margins further eroded, causing Steelway to lose significant market share to competitors from south of the border. Although it would take the company several years before the sales volume would be back up to pre-2008 numbers, in contrast to the recession of the early 1990s, Steelway was never in real danger of going under due to its much stronger market position, its financial strength and diversity of products.

To stay competitive in a much tougher market, Steelway undertook a number of initiatives to reduce costs and maintain a steady workflow without relying on extreme measures such as mass layoffs. "We started looking at different ways of making our product, and taking some

of the cost out," says Jason. "Not being cheaper in the sense of creating a lower quality product, but cheaper in that we reduced the cost of production."

Workshare was Steelway's preferred way of lowering production costs while continuing to live up to its commitment to employees and their families. Rather than announcing massive layoffs, the management team asked all Steelway employees to work reduced hours and to take a share of the hit. Jake Giesbrecht remembers: "Out on the floor, we would do a three or four-day work week. Management asked us to help contribute, so we all took one day off a week and moved on." Brian DeJeu emphasizes that sharing the burden resulted in a "we are all in this together" attitude and, in retrospect, created a lot of solidarity within and between the various departments. "Everyone did it. It was a percentage over so many weeks that you had to take off, and so people made the best of it," Brian remembers.

The workshare program lasted on and off for about two years until the worst of the recession was over. It was a risk, as Jason states, because workshare as a concept isn't exactly designed for a company like Steelway that is exposed to seasonal changes in sales volumes. The fact that construction drops off in the wintertime added another layer of complexity to the undertaking. In retrospect, however, workshare was a great success. Not only did the program allow Steelway to save costs at a crucial time, but it did so in a way that was entirely consistent with the company's core values as a family business that considers employees "part of the family."

## The Halton Hills Heat Recovery Steam Generators Building

Of the many building projects undertaken by Steelway since 2000, one that holds a special place in the annals of the company is the Halton Hills Combined Cycle Plant (CCP), also known as Halton Hills Generating Station (HHGS) that was officially opened in October 2010. Located in the Town of Halton Hills, Ontario, the building is 118 feet high and 126 feet wide, and is supported by nine-foot-deep steel columns. With its capacity to produce up to 693 megawatts of energy using an intake of natural gas, it generates enough power to meet the needs of approximately 700,000 households in the region.

As with many other signature projects over the years, the Halton Hills generating station is a tangible expression of the collaborative efforts of Steelway employees

and their joint capabilities to create complex buildings of any size. David Smith who was hired as a facility manager at Steelway in 2006, expresses a sentiment shared by many Steelway employees: "There is something to be said for how steel structures are very tangible. Every time I drive by that power generating station, I look at it and say to myself 'that is the building we made.'"

David's sentiment is echoed by many other Steelway employees when referring to Steelway buildings around the world with a clear sense of collective accomplishment and pride. In that way, projects like the Melbourne Grain Storage Building, the Havana Airport, the Steelway building at the Kathmandu airport or the Halton Hills generating station have become monuments not only to Steelway as a company, but to Steelway employees as co-creators of landmarks of lasting significance.



The Halton Hills Generating Station in Halton Hills, Ontario.

## Robotic Welding Cell

Both the recession and Steelway's unique ability to design and build ever more complex structures only reinforced what the leadership team, going back to the days of Glen, had believed all along. That to be a market leader, Steelway needed to keep investing into state-of-the-art equipment and processes on an ongoing basis. Based on this core belief, 2011 saw the purchase and installation of what is arguably the most technically advanced piece of equipment acquired throughout the company's history—a \$400,000 robotic welding cell.

The advantages that the Canadian-built robot offered were threefold: it reduced costs, improved the quality of the product, and increased the overall capacity of the plant. The robot allowed Steelway to subject large pieces of steel of up to 64 feet in length to an automated welding process. "The robot doesn't take a break, so it can work on that big weld job constantly," Bryan Hernandez explains. He is quick to add, though, that the robot has its limitations, and that there are still plenty of welding jobs that need to be done by hand.

## Purchase of Zelus

From its founding in 2001, Steelway's crane division SMH had developed into a considerable part of the overall business. In spite of Steelway being very good at manufacturing great quality cranes, the Whites had stayed away from moving the company towards more complex crane designs due to a number of limiting factors. In contrast to companies that specialized in cranes only, Steelway lacked the ability to service and install the cranes it built. As well, due to Steelway's geographical location, key markets for the use of cranes in industrial facilities, most notably the Greater Toronto and Hamilton areas, had remained out of reach.

Against this background, Jason and Bryan realized that if they wanted to become more seriously involved in the crane business, they needed to add more specialized expertise in the form of a separate company with a physical location in the GTA and Hamilton area. With hundreds of cranes in the market and no team in place to service them, the White family was faced with two options—either grow a service group

from the ground up or acquire an existing crane service business. Jason and Bryan decided to purchase a reputable crane company that would allow their evolving group of companies to become a more integrated solutions provider with a level of specialization and expertise on the material handling side that matched its leadership role in the manufacturing of steel buildings.

As they put their plan into action, the Whites looked into four potential candidates for a buyout, including Zelus Material Handling in Stoney Creek, Ontario. While meeting with the founding partners of Zelus, the synergies became instantly apparent. As a result, the White family made an offer that was accepted and acquired Zelus on July 1, 2012 as a standalone enterprise separate from Steelway.



## History of Zelus

Zelus Material Handling was founded in 2002 by Paul Mercuri, Todd Held, Mike Edwards and Judy Atkinson, long-time employees of Larco Industrial Services, a crane service division of Hamilton Steeplejacks Ltd. They started Zelus for designing, manufacturing and servicing overhead cranes, jib cranes, monorails and hoists. The partners named their business Zelus after the Greek god who was the personification of emulation, zeal and dedication. They chose the name both for the notion it conveyed and its brevity which made it easy for people to recognize and remember. Similar to Steelway, Zelus started out in a small shop and grew over time. By the time it joined the Steelway family, Zelus had over 50 employees servicing the needs of customers across North America and a reputation as a company uniquely qualified to create innovative solutions—from small work cells to large-capacity cranes customized to the specific material handling needs of each client. In addition to its 24-hour service and customized inspection and maintenance programs, Zelus was exceptional at producing highly complex cranes, both the "weird and the wonderful," as Bryan White puts it.



**“ We liked the Steelway philosophy, it was similar to ours. Although we weren’t family, we ran Zelus like a family business. Steelway had a lot of the same culture and it just looked like it was going to be a nice, easy transition. ”**

- Paul Mercuri

Merging Zelus into the developing group of companies owned by the White family turned out to be a successful marriage on many different levels. The timing of the Whites’ offer could not have been any better from the Zelus owners’ perspective. As Judy was looking at retirement, Paul, Todd and Mike weren’t certain on how to go about the transition. Joining what has since become Ardent Industries Ltd. allowed the Zelus founders to make the necessary changes without disrupting the company. Furthermore, from a business development perspective, coming under the umbrella of the group of companies owned by the White family suggested an even larger market footprint for Zelus in the future, as the company would benefit from the marketing juggernaut behind the larger Steelway brand. From a value and philosophy perspective as well, bringing Zelus under the ownership of the White family seemed to be a perfect fit as the Whites and the founders of Zelus shared similar core beliefs and values for their respective companies. Paul, Todd, Mike and Judy had built Zelus from scratch and felt deeply committed to their employees. In light of this, it was imperative for them that the new owners of the company would be genuine and equally committed to the core values Zelus had been founded on. The foundation of Zelus had been the founders’ goal to create a place where employees would be happy, have fun, and where strong leadership would define the course of the company. Similar to Steelway, Zelus was a business that prided itself on doing the highest quality work and cultivating strong relationships with customers. “We liked the Steelway philosophy,” says Paul. “It was similar to ours. Although we weren’t family, we ran Zelus like a family business. Steelway had a lot of the same culture and it just looked like it was going to be a nice, easy transition.”

As hoped for by both the founders of Zelus and Jason and Bryan White, the integration of Zelus turned out to be a smooth process. Today, Paul, Todd and Mike continue to run the day-to-day operations of the company they founded. To allow for a clear distinction between the Zelus and SMH brands in the market place, until 2015 any crane that was manufactured for use with a Steelway building carried the SMH name whereas any crane that was sold by Zelus carried the Zelus brand. This way, both divisions worked in tandem with one another without creating competition between the two brands. “It’s a win for both companies,” Bryan explained in a 2012 interview with the local media.<sup>30</sup> Since then, the SMH brand has been folded and all cranes created are marketed under the Zelus name. In addition, a large portion of the business continues to involve the manufacturing of cranes for other crane companies under their respective brands.

Sue and Bryan Hernandez.



## Losing Bryan Hernandez

Bryan Hernandez, who in 1978 joined what was then Glen White Industries, played an outstanding role in the evolution of Steelway in his many different roles with the company over the course of 37 years. From erecting buildings and driving trucks in the early days, to sales and estimating, and then ultimately as a member of the management team, Bryan touched all aspects of the business. Sadly, Bryan passed away from cancer on November 14, 2015 at age 56. In Bryan's passing, the steel building industry in Canada lost a true expert and advocate. "There was no one who knew more about steel buildings than Bryan, just ask him," laughs Jason. Bryan was a true believer in the work that the Canadian Sheet Steel Building Institute did for the industry. He sat on many committees and was serving a term as President of the Institute just before his passing. Part of his lasting legacy is that of being an excellent problem solver. Darell Morris of Spantech, who knew Bryan both in his professional role and as a close personal friend, remembers: "The one thing about Bryan was that he was always able to think outside the box and he was able to resolve things by going back to engineering and saying, 'why don't we do it this way?' He just had the natural ability to design and engineer things without being an engineer. He was a wealth of information and there was always something he was able to do to solve a problem."

In 2014, Zelus purchased Pro-Crane Hoist Repairs, a crane service company operating out of Oakville since 1985. Pro-Crane had been one of the four companies that Jason and Bryan had looked into purchasing originally after they had decided to expand their group's crane manufacturing and servicing capabilities. By amalgamating Pro-Crane into Zelus, Zelus was able to expand its services throughout southern Ontario and the GTA, effectively growing the group's customer base. "The value of adding and incorporating Pro-Crane into Zelus was its territory. Pro-Crane didn't manufacture cranes at all, but had customers that were asking for cranes," says Bryan. "Purchasing Pro-Crane and amalgamating it into Zelus helped us grow the customer base and our pool of technicians," Jason adds.

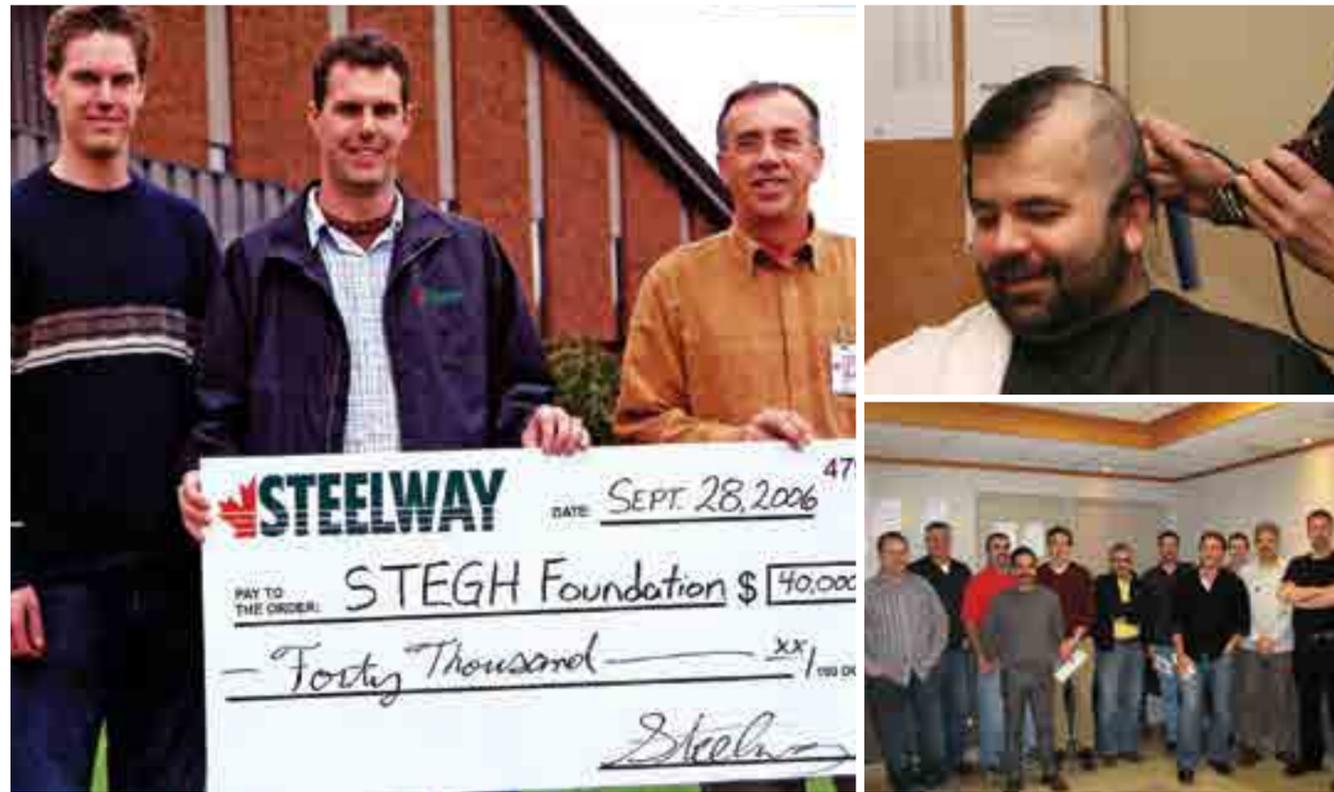
With the combined sales efforts put towards new cranes by both Zelus and Steelway, the demand outgrew the manufacturing capacity and capabilities of the Springwater and Stoney Creek production areas. The decision was made in early 2015 to find a facility large enough to meet the increased demand requirement. An existing 40,000 square foot facility was found in Tillsonburg that was a perfect fit and by the end of the year, all production from Springwater was moved to the new location. The first major project in this combined facility was two massive 205 foot span double girder cranes. "A project of this magnitude would not have been possible in our previous facility. There are very few companies in Canada that would have the ability to manufacture what we can," notes Bryan White.



**"Everybody getting behind that common goal is a reflection of the generosity of our employees and our shared values in the business."**

- Jason White





## Community Involvement

In 2001, Glen made the point that a core part of his philosophy as an entrepreneur was “to give back to the community.”<sup>31</sup> Since then, joint support of community initiatives by the White family, Steelway and Steelway employees has continued to take on many shapes and forms. Some of these initiatives include a \$25,000 donation to the East Elgin Community Complex, supplying St. Thomas Elgin General Hospital with a tractor and trailer for the Christmas Parade, as well as participating in the East Elgin Secondary School Co-op program. Of the well over 100 local high school students that have spent time at Steelway as Co-op students since 2002, several have pursued careers in the trades.

The United Way, and through it a variety of local charities, has been the beneficiary of many fundraising events put on by Steelway since 2000. In 2001, Steelway held a company picnic at the Springwater Conservation Area to once again raise money for the United Way. One of the attractions was a dunk tank, where employees could dunk the managers, including Glen and Jason, in exchange for a donation. In 2012, Steelway was recognized as the largest Aylmer division donor to the United Way. The tradition of maintaining an active presence with the Heart and Stroke Foundation by participating in the Big Bike event has continued as well with thousands of dollars contributed over the years.

The local hospital continues to be a significant focus of the White family and Steelway’s joint efforts to give back to the community. After Glen was diagnosed with colon cancer, he felt it important to

bring more awareness to the disease. In an effort to do so, the family donated a \$40,000 colonoscope to the local hospital. Glen had always been an advocate of the importance of having regular examinations and wanted the hospital to have the latest equipment at hand. He ensured the local newspapers reported about the donation so the community knew of his efforts to promote regular testing and early detection of colon cancer.

After Glen had passed in late 2006, the donations collected in his memory were given to the St. Thomas Elgin General Hospital accompanied with an additional cheque for \$15,000 from the White family to purchase a second colonoscope. As part of his enduring legacy, Glen had asked Pat to continue making a donation of at least \$25,000 every year to the hospital, an amount that on average, the family has greatly exceeded. It’s a tradition that has continued since Glen’s passing and one that allowed the St. Thomas Elgin General Hospital Foundation to purchase a third colonoscope in 2008. At present, the White family continues to make large annual donations towards the expansion of the hospital that broke ground in 2015.

Steelway’s annual golf tournament had been a mainstay for many years when in 2007, John Hart, a Steelway employee of 22 years, suffered a heart attack and died while on the golf course. In his memory, Steelway continues to raise money for the St. Thomas Elgin General Hospital Foundation towards new patientcare equipment, turning what was once just a fun event into yet another exercise in charity and a means of encouraging people to give back to their community.

Another core area of ongoing concern for Steelway and Steelway employees are the local Aylmer and St. Thomas food banks. Since the early 2000s, Steelway has held an annual Christmas fundraiser in the form of a week-long campaign with every dollar raised by employees matched by Steelway. In 2001, \$2,600 was donated to the East Elgin Christmas Care food basket program and that number has risen from \$18,000 for the St. Thomas Caring Cupboard Food Bank and the Aylmer Corner Cupboard Food Bank in 2012, to over \$23,000 in 2013, and a total of over \$33,000 in 2014. In 2015, another record was set with a total amount of \$40,000, being raised for the two local food banks.

An expression of its commitment to the local community, in August 2012, Steelway was presented with the Aylmer Area Community Foundation Corporate Award for its ongoing support of food banks, the St. Thomas Elgin General Hospital and the United Way. Seeing donations grow each and every year and having everyone contribute to the annual campaigns leaves the White family incredibly proud of their employees. “Everybody getting behind that common goal is a reflection of the generosity of our employees and our shared values in the business,” Jason emphasizes.



BECOMING ARDENT

06

**“ Everything is about number one and you have to strive to be number one and put your own parameters on what being number one means. ”**

- Rob Collins

### **Ardent Industries and Steelway Today**

Words like passion, devotion, and enthusiasm have become synonymous with Steelway. These key cultural elements contributing to the long term success of the company can be summarized by one word: Ardent. In 2016, Ardent Industries Ltd. was created to tie together the independent brands owned by the White Family, which are currently Steelway Building Systems, ExSteel Building Components, and Zelus Material Handling. Intent on embodying the meaning of the work, this new, holistic brand allows for the independent operation of each business unit while sharing culture, management, and marketing initiatives through an umbrella company. Given the White Family's appetite for growth, Ardent also positions the family well for future acquisition opportunities. Spread across four main production facilities (Springwater, Aylmer, Stoney Creek and Tillsonburg) and with a combined workforce of almost 300 employees, Ardent Industries leads the industry in Canada in terms of product quality, diversity, and ability to create the most complex customized building solutions for its customers.

Within the new umbrella structure, Steelway, as the leading Canadian manufacturer of steel building systems for use in industrial, commercial, agricultural, recreational and institutional applications across Canada, the northern United States and around the world, offers a wide-ranging array of products and services to both the Canadian and international markets.

With standard building sizes being a thing of the past, Steelway buildings are completely customized to meet each customer's unique needs. The buildings that the company offers are broken down into different styles, including the Clear Span (a large, open space building uninterrupted by interior columns), Multi Span (a building with a row of columns down the centre that reduces the building's weight and cost), and Hybrid buildings (a flat roof building that inverts the slope of rigid frames). On top of that, Steelway offers conventional as well as mini-storage buildings, and several different types of cladding based on the kind of finalized look that customers desire.

Producing a top quality product that stands up to challenging conditions and heavy use is at the forefront of all of Steelway's processes. From early on, Steelway buildings earned the reputation of being made of heavier and higher quality steel than those of the competition. It is not without a certain sense of pride that Steelway employees point to buildings that were built in the 1970s and 1980s and are still in use today. Mario Aveiro, founder of Aveiro Constructors, explains what makes a Steelway building stand out from a builder's perspective: "Over the years, one of the big differences is that while other steel building providers have lowered the quality of what they build by using thin cold rolled material and holding light-gauge stuff together with clips and so on, Steelway never has. Steelway stayed true to heavier steel." ExSteel extends that quality standard to building components while Zelus cranes are built on a similar premise, which is: to deliver material handling equipment that meets or exceeds the requirements of all applicable codes, specifications and industry standards.





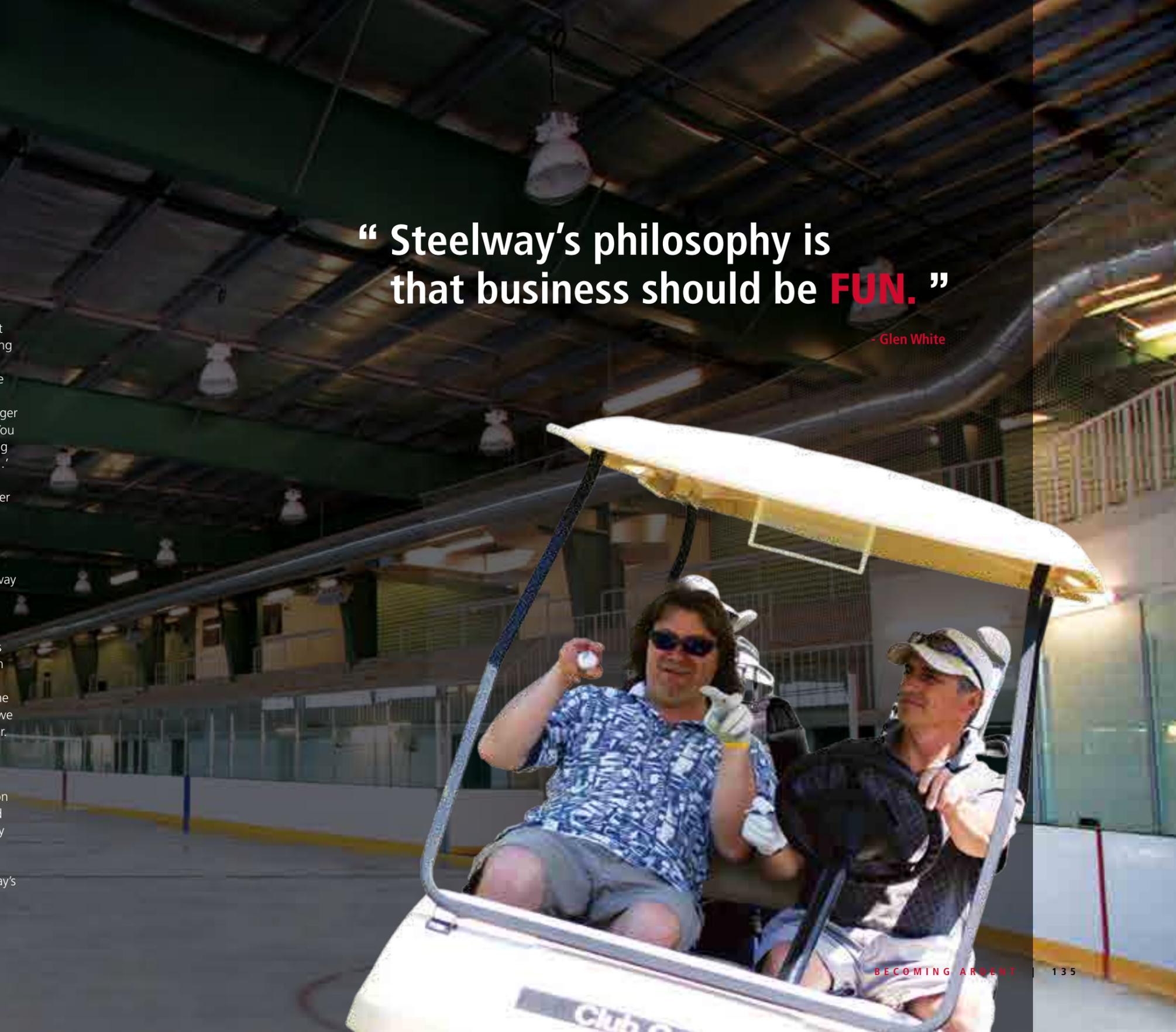
An ongoing theme in the Steelway and, by extension, the Ardent story is building and maintaining a market leader position by doing things differently, taking on the most challenging projects and always being creative in solving problems. Glen was driven by the desire to build a company that would be “number one” in the market, ahead of competitors, most of which are significantly larger U.S. players. Rob Collins remembers Glen once saying to him: “You will never read a headline saying, ‘The number two metal building manufacturer in the world, the number two auto manufacturer...’ Everything is about number one and you have to strive to be number one and put your own parameters on what being number one means.”

At the heart of the Steelway success story is the fact that the company was set up from the beginning to solve customers’ problems rather than just providing buildings. The story of Steelway is one of using creativity to find solutions to complex design, engineering and manufacturing challenges. Glen’s creativity and noted ability to devise engineering solutions that no one else thought were possible, as expressed in his famous sketches in his even more famous portfolio notebook, created a culture in which the word “no” hardly ever exists. “‘No’ is not a word that I use often,” Glen once said. Instead of asking “should we do this?” he usually went straight to the problem-solving stage of “how can we do this?” to give his customers the solution they were looking for.

The belief that every challenge, regardless of its complexity, has a solution is ingrained into the very fabric of Steelway and its people. Creativity extends to all areas, from concept to production and delivery. An extension of the thought process that originated with Glen’s insatiable passion for engineering, people at Steelway individually and collectively have provided answers to the most complex questions and in the process created the “we can build anything” and “the sky is the limit” attitudes that define Steelway’s standing in the industry today.

“ Steelway’s philosophy is that business should be **FUN.** ”

- Glen White



As the company went from being a manufacturer of pre-engineered buildings to being an integrated custom solutions provider for buildings and cranes, projects that when first presented seemed impossible, are viewed today as mere stepping stones in a dynamic process that keeps carrying its momentum forward. Rob Collins sums it up the best: “What initially was something that seemed impossible became an open-ended series of ‘get out of the box with your thinking.’”

Willingness to always try new things and create real solutions for customers goes a long way when paired with the use of cutting-edge technology. By keeping up with technology as it becomes available, Steelway, as a member of Ardent Industries, is able to meet the requirements and project specifications of the most complex designs quickly and efficiently. Glen once stated that cutting-edge technology “is the key to today’s success,”<sup>32</sup> and that notion is shared by today’s leadership. A recent project undertaken for Stubbe’s Precast, a family-owned business that makes precast panels and other concrete products, required the Steelway team to create a building with a high peak of about 70 feet, yet without some of the internal columns normally required, and with other columns not making contact with the ground level at all. Had it not been for the continual updating of technology—in this case, Steelway’s 3D steel design and detailing software, this project would have arguably not been able to be completed to the client’s unique specifications. Steve White, who started at Steelway as a student in 1983 and who in spite of sharing the same name is not related to the owners of Steelway, expresses what many Steelway employees feel in view of the dynamic character of the company’s ongoing evolution: “It is starting to remind

me again of those early days because some of the projects we are doing now are almost on the fringe of what we can do again.”

### The Steelway Legacy

In continuous operation since 1976, Steelway, as a member of Ardent Industries is a company with a distinct legacy that is defined by continuity in values and vision, its character as a family business, ongoing focus on building long-term relationships and creating positive experiences for employees and customers, as well as living up to its commitment to the community.

Although the company has changed a lot over the course of forty years in terms of capabilities, size, complexity, and geographical reach, Steelway continues to operate on the same core values that guided Glen and Pat when they started Glen White Industries in their backyard in Springwater in 1976. Committed long-time employees and a company culture built on the ideals of quality, integrity, family and community have allowed Steelway to materialize on many exciting opportunities over the years. Says Darell Morris of Spantech, a distributor of Steelway buildings since 1991: “Steelway has built a reputation in the industry based on Glen’s core values of integrity and honesty.”

It is these strong foundations that have helped the company through challenging times such as three major recessions and the sudden loss of Glen in 2006. When Jason and Bryan took over the business from their parents, they never saw themselves as the “second generation” of White family entrepreneurs. Looking at the larger picture, they describe their joint leadership role as more of a direct continuation of the vision that Glen had

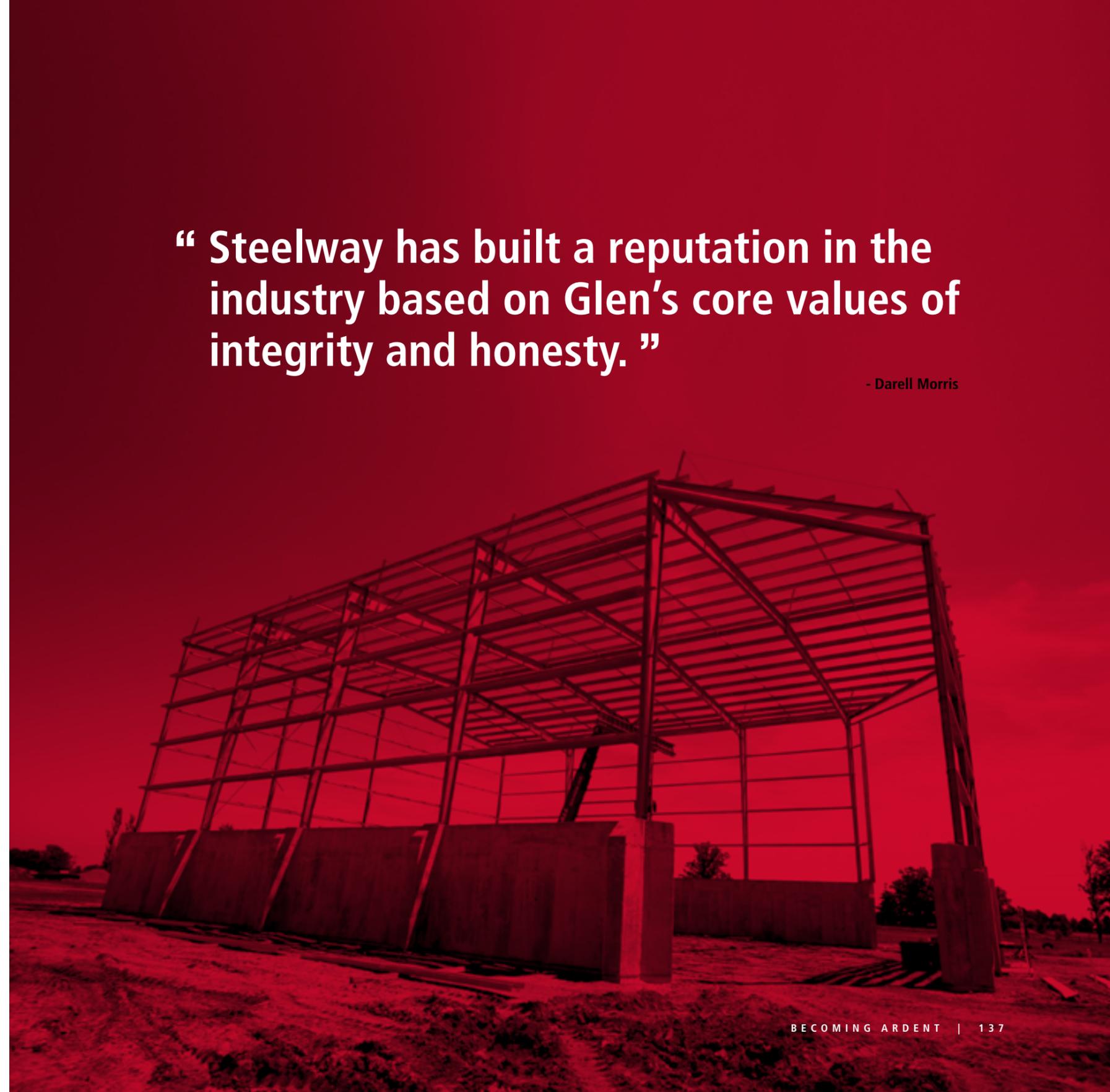
established. From their early childhood days, Jason and Bryan have always been a part of Steelway and Steelway a part of them. In that sense, there is no gap between Glen and Pat and their sons’ leadership today, allowing Jason and Bryan to leave their own mark as entrepreneurs while maintaining the overall course, culture and values that have defined Steelway since its early beginnings.

Steelway has, as a company, always been a family business. As such, it is defined by the absence of bureaucratic structures, complicated hierarchies and red tape that burden so many corporations. Ed Thomson remembers joining Steelway in the early 1990s after working for a significantly larger and much more corporate competitor for years as “a breath of fresh air,” echoing Glen’s core imperative that “the difference between Steelway and others is very evident in the way we do business and with our philosophy towards people.”<sup>33</sup>

Although the much larger size of Steelway and the spread of Ardent Industries’ workforce across four different locations today has made daily face to face interaction with the owners more difficult, open access, putting people first and treating employees as family has remained at the heart of the Steelway fabric and culture. “It’s a family-type atmosphere here, where you can enjoy yourself,” says Bryan. “Although as you get larger it becomes more difficult to maintain that family feeling, I think we do a great job of maintaining the family business element at Steelway.” It’s a balancing act, yet the concept of treating the organization as one that is affable, personable and above all, creates an atmosphere of belonging and familiarity, is a driving factor behind the creation of Ardent Industries.

“ Steelway has built a reputation in the industry based on Glen’s core values of integrity and honesty. ”

- Darell Morris



Steelway building projects shown are Cooney Transport in Brantford, Ontario (top left); MTS Iceplex, an arena with 4 NHL sized rinks in Winnipeg, Manitoba (top right); The Elgin & St. Thomas Paramedic facility in St. Thomas, Ontario (bottom left); The Aylmer fire hall in Aylmer, Ontario (bottom right).



"I think it is important to maintain as much of those family business values as you can while balancing out those things you need to do as a large organization," says Jason. It's a notion that Steelway and its sister companies are committed to carrying over into the future, holding on to Glen's business philosophy and applying it to a larger, more modern setting.

Perhaps one of the most important foundations of Steelway and Ardent Industries' cultural identity is its self-professed business philosophy. Aside from "no" being a rare word, and being willing to take on any project, regardless of size and complexity, the internal philosophy of Steelway is built on the premise of long-term relationships. For Glen, cultivating strong, lasting relationships with employees, builders, customers, suppliers and the community was a vital part of the overall success of Steelway. It is an imperative that is echoed by Jason and Bryan, who refer to business as a "series of relationships with employees, customers, vendors and the community."

In a positioning statement Glen wrote in the 1990s and that today constitutes the "founder's philosophy," Glen stated that "Steelway's philosophy is that business should be fun. If you buy a product from us, it should be an enjoyable experience. If you work for us, you should enjoy your job and, if you sell to us, it should be a positive experience."<sup>34</sup> It is a premise that continues to drive Steelway forward under the motto of "Fair and Fun." "I spend way too much time at work to not enjoy it," says Bryan, who came up with the concept of "Fair and Fun." "If you spend almost half your waking life at work, you should be having fun and enjoying yourself." Jason, likewise, states rhetorically: "If it isn't fun why are we doing this?"

Being part of the community continues to be a core component of the very fabric and identity of Steelway. Glen made it a point to emphasize that he didn't care as much about how much money he made as what he did with that money, a recurring theme throughout his entire life. To the same effect, for Jason and Bryan, giving back to the community is a core mantra within their self-definition as entrepreneurs. "We often joke that our father was in business so he could build equipment for himself and profits were side benefits of that. As we are continuing to learn more about our business and what has made it successful we believe that our true purpose isn't making money. It is about what we are doing for our community, providing great jobs and supporting great families, and trying to do that in the best way we can. Making great products is a means to that end."

## The Steelway of Tomorrow

As Steelway enters its fifth decade as a founding member of Ardent Industries, there is a lot of optimism for the future. "I think there will be a lot of opportunities for people to do a lot of things if we do it right," Jason states with great confidence. In regards to key relationships, continuing to work closely with affiliated builders from across Canada, almost all of which have been affiliated with Steelway for decades, will remain a key priority.

From the group's current position as a diversified market leader with an experienced team and state-of-the-art capabilities, there is a lot of room to keep growing its market presence both in Canada and internationally. In contrast to the U.S., where steel building systems account for half of the non-residential building market, the share in Canada is significantly lower. Closing that gap through educating current and future architects and engineers on the virtually unlimited possibilities of using steel building systems in their designs carries with it the potential for significant growth in the future. For Steelway as a Canadian manufacturer with strong representation across the country, there are still many opportunities in certain areas and markets across Canada. "Analyzing our channels to market is one way in which we can quickly develop new business," notes Mike Leach, Steelway's Vice President of Sales and Marketing since 2014.

Without a doubt, under the new banner of "Being Ardent," marketing will take on a more significant role in the near future to

the effect that the revised brand will become more recognizable in a larger market place. In creating a consistent brand image for the entire group, Ardent will serve as a framework for further horizontal integration, making it easier for the White family to keep adding to existing capabilities as new opportunities present themselves.

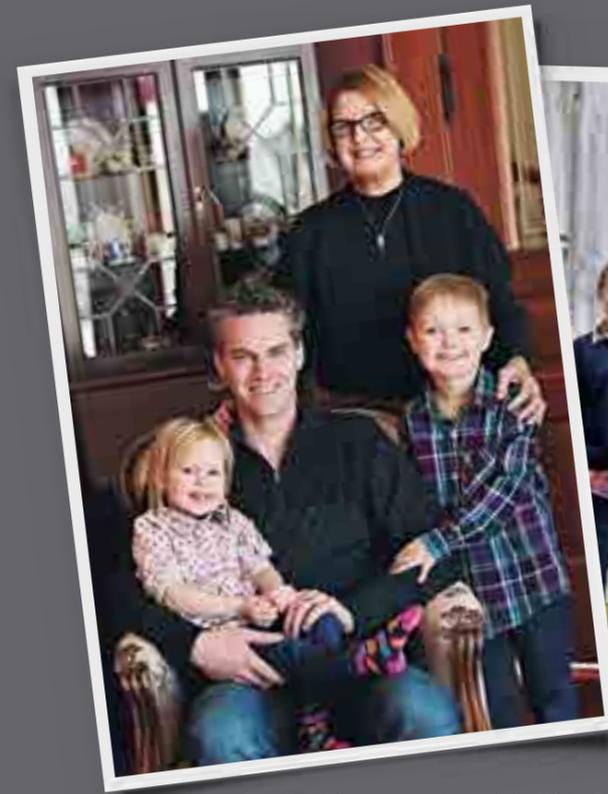
With an eye to the near future, Jason and Bryan are preparing for a different kind of transition. Many Steelway employees have been with the company for over 30 years and are getting close to retirement age. "I see a lot of changes in staff coming," says Jason. "A lot of retirements are coming up, and that involves a lot of succession planning." The same applies to many of Steelway's valued affiliated builders that have grown alongside Steelway for decades and many of which are getting ready to transition into the next generation.

Looking at Steelway and Ardent Industries today, Pat White cannot believe just how far the company that she and Glen founded has come. She is immensely proud of Jason and Bryan and the entire team for not only having maintained where she and Glen left off, but for continuing to build upon Glen's great legacy. "I am blown away by what the Steelway family has achieved and by Jason and Bryan's leadership," she says. "Seeing them take the company that Glen had built and make it even bigger and more complex makes me hugely proud of everyone. I know Glen would be proud as well. I don't have the slightest doubt that Steelway and Ardent Industries will have an amazing future."



## The Next Generation...

With the children from both Jason and Bryan ranging in ages from 4 to 18, there will be many exciting possibilities for the future. There is absolutely no expectation for the children to be involved in the organization, but the door will be left open. "We make sure to involve the kids as much as possible in Steelway and Zelus special events to expose them to the culture and the people who make up our extended family," says Bryan. It is common for the kids to come to work with their parents during school holidays. They enjoy spending time in the office, getting to know the staff and witnessing the activities related to running a business. As a proud father, Jason enjoys "listening to the kids talk about what their potential roles in the company could be. I am so curious to see the direction that all our kids will take."



Top: Three generations of the White Family. Front, Left to Right: Aidan (Jason's son), Madison (Jason's daughter), Escher (Bryan's son). Back, Left to Right: Jason, Patricia, Elva, Bryan, Ayla (Bryan's daughter) Bottom left to right: (1) Left to Right: Ayla, Bryan, and Escher White. Standing in the back: Pat White, mother of Bryan and Jason and wife of Steelway founder Glen White. (2) Left to Right: Aidan, Makenzie (Jason's daughter), Madison and Jason White. (3) Bryan and Jason White with their grandmother, Steelway founder Glen White's mother, Elva White.

## Acknowledgements

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Photos on pages 7 and 117, courtesy of Elgin This Month.

Cartoon on page 78, courtesy of The Aylmer Express.

## Endnotes

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