

**ACE WIRE SPRING & FORM MEDIA CENTER**

**ALL IN THE FAMILY. ACE WIRE SPRING AND FORM CELEBRATES 80 YEARS OF MANUFACTURING EXCELLENCE**

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 By Hank Walkshak

What do you do, if you possess a tenor voice of operatic quality and are considering a career singing opera, but have manufacturing inclinations besides? That’s the challenge Joe Vodvarka faced in 1939. “What if I lost my voice?” he thought. “How would I support a family?”

That’s why he opted to forego an operatic career and instead, turned to manufacturing. He founded Ace Wire Spring and Form Co., Inc. a family owned and operated business to this day.

Family members comprised Vodvarka’s first employees – his mother, his wife and his father, also a Joe, who was a machinist by trade and had emigrated from Czechoslovakia. Vodvarka’s company operated as a small custom job shop—taking one-time orders or blanket orders over time in the attic of his home in Stowe Township. He served both small and large companies requiring custom precision springs and wire forms.

A telemarketer before his time, Vodvarka contacted potential customers by phone making cold calls. There weren’t monies for advertising.



Joe Vodvarka, Founder of Ace Wire Spring and Linda's father.

Joe Vodvarka, a Machinist who worked at Ace, and his son's father and Linda's grandfather.

Current Family Owners, Rich and Linda Froehlich, and their son, Ritchie Froehlich, General Manager.



It wasn't until early in the 1940s that he built his first factory which was adjacent to his home. The structure was a three-story, wooden building, and the office was in the living room of the family's home. Shortly thereafter, he hired five employees from the local neighborhood and many of them worked for the company until their retirement.

Some years later, Vodvarka's oldest son (Joey) entered the business along with a few other family members until 1976. In December of that year, Vodvarka's daughter, Linda Froehlich, and her husband, Rich Froehlich, purchased Ace Wire Spring and Form Co., Inc. and became the proud new owners of the company. They represented the third generation of the family to operate the business.

Soon after, Linda and Rich made changes to move the company ahead in its domestic and international market spaces. "We added computer controlled (CNC) manufacturing machinery to speed up the production of springs and wire forms while maintaining the quality," Linda pointed out.

Actually, the Froehlichs invested in multiple, computer-controlled CNC machinery to manufacture precision custom springs and wire forms. "Replacing the mechanical machines with CNC machines eliminated the time-consuming, mechanical set-up and run times required to manufacture high quality, precision custom springs and wire forms," Rich emphasized.

"This transition," he added "also enabled Ace Wire Spring and Form Co., Inc. to compete head-to-head with both domestic and international producers of custom springs and wire forms by speeding up delivery of quality finished springs and wire forms at competitive prices."

At the same time, Linda and Rich started extensive advertising and actively exhibited in various trade shows throughout North America. They also hired manufacturing representatives to represent their product lines. Today, most of the 50 states are covered by one of their agents.

"We continued to remain a job shop that responded to our customers' requirements (single orders and blanket orders)," Rich emphasized. "Our manufacturing runs totaled between one to one million pieces, and we continued to market and sell to all companies both internationally and domestically."

"In effect," Linda remarked, "Ace Wire Spring and Form Co., Inc. managed to stay and grow as a job shop, whereas many other family owned companies either closed their shops or were acquired by larger conglomerates."



A key reason for the long life of the company lies in the high value levels anchored by the company's experienced, talent-rich employees, some of whom have been with the company 40, 50 and even 60 years. The company's highly qualified engineering staff provides customers with valuable support in the design of compression, extension, torsion, double torsion, conical, garter springs and specialty springs and wire forms.

Design for manufacturability is key to a successful and sustained product launch. Ace's engineers assist customers at all stages of product development. This includes initial-part design, prototyping, production and post-production. Part design, tolerancing and wire selection are just a few examples of quality-design engineering assistance provided by the company's experienced engineers.

Job sharing and cross training also continue at a constant pace at Ace Wire Spring and Form Co., Inc. That way, more employees know how to operate various production machines, and to enable the company to continue manufacturing at a constant rate instead of slowing down production when employee absences arise.

Linda emphasized that apart from added production equipment, Ace Wire Spring and Form Co., Inc. employs some of the most loyal individuals. For example, early in the 1980s, as the economy sagged, employees whom the company had laid off, came to work without pay, instead of staying at home. Of course, the company hired them back as soon as the economy moved back into high gear.

"Our past is prologue to our future. We expect our company to last successfully for another 80 years with the support and dedication of our Employees and our future family members. At Ace, it's always SPRING-time!" Linda proudly observed.