

Irwin Deister Jr. and E. Mark Deister

For Irwin Deister Jr. and E. Mark Deister, an ongoing focus on quality products and customer service for the aggregate and mining industry is the foundation for success at Deister Machine Company. What began in 1906 with their grandfather's first separating table has grown into an impressively large Fort Wayne-based company – one that is still family-owned, employs 255 people, and has a strong reputation around the world.

Today, in a unique management structure, the men serve as the company's co-CEOs. Today Deister Machine Company sells equipment to companies across all 50 states and Canada and in many countries throughout Latin America, Europe and Asia.

“We are equal partners in this still family-owned business,” says Irwin Deister, co-CEO and the company's chairman. “We are committed to sharing responsibilities as co-CEOs, yet we each have our areas of individual responsibility. Mark is responsible for the production and engineering aspects of the company, and I manage the sales, administrative and financial aspects.”

“What makes it work is that we want it to work. We remain objective in our business relationship, and I recognize that I couldn't do his job and vice versa,” says E. Mark Deister, co-CEO and the company's president.

Neither Irwin nor Mark started their full-time careers in senior management at Deister Machine Company. Irwin worked in sales and was promoted to sales manager before being named vice president of sales and marketing. Mark started in engineering, and his responsibilities in management increased until the men assumed their co-CEO positions in 1988.

“The key to our company's reputation is that we take care of every problem. If something goes wrong, a Deister Machine Company representative is at the customer's location that day or the next,” Mark says.

“We are focused on the quality of our products, and we are committed to service excellence,” Irwin adds. “Customers can count on being taken care of by well trained personnel who are customer-driven.”

Another important component of the company's success is the value Irwin and Mark place on their employees. They seek out the advice of their executive committee members, and they maintain an open door policy that encourages employees to share ideas and concerns.

“We are dedicated to our employees, each of whom makes the success of Deister Machine Company possible. We have built employee loyalty by remaining loyal to them, through the good times and the hard times,” Mark says.

Irwin and Mark say they welcome the opportunity to invest in each employee. That investment includes cross-training and job opportunities that challenge employees and reward them for their hard work. To further support employees, in 2005, Irwin and Mark implemented a unique chaplaincy benefit, offering the services of Corporate Chaplains of America. The company was the first in Fort Wayne to offer this service, and other local companies have now contracted with CCA.

Irwin and Mark also value their business relationships with others in the community. They buy material and equipment from local vendors that remain committed and competitive, for example. They also maintain strong business relationships with others that provide services to Deister Machine Company.

“Even though our company has very few sales within Fort Wayne due to the type of equipment we manufacture, we are part of the community and we feel responsible to it,” Irwin says. “We employ the community’s residents, we have raised our families here, and we are personally active within it. We want to support the community that supports Deister Machine Company.”

One way the company supports the Fort Wayne community is by giving to it financially. Annually, five percent of the company’s net revenue is donated to charitable organizations in the community. The beneficiaries are chosen by the co-CEOs, who both feel they have been blessed and know that community organizations can benefit from their support.

Both men personally support a number of organizations within the community, too. In 1998, both Mark and Irwin were honored as Northern Indiana Entrepreneur of the Year finalists. The men also support the aggregate industry by actively participating in a variety of key organizations.