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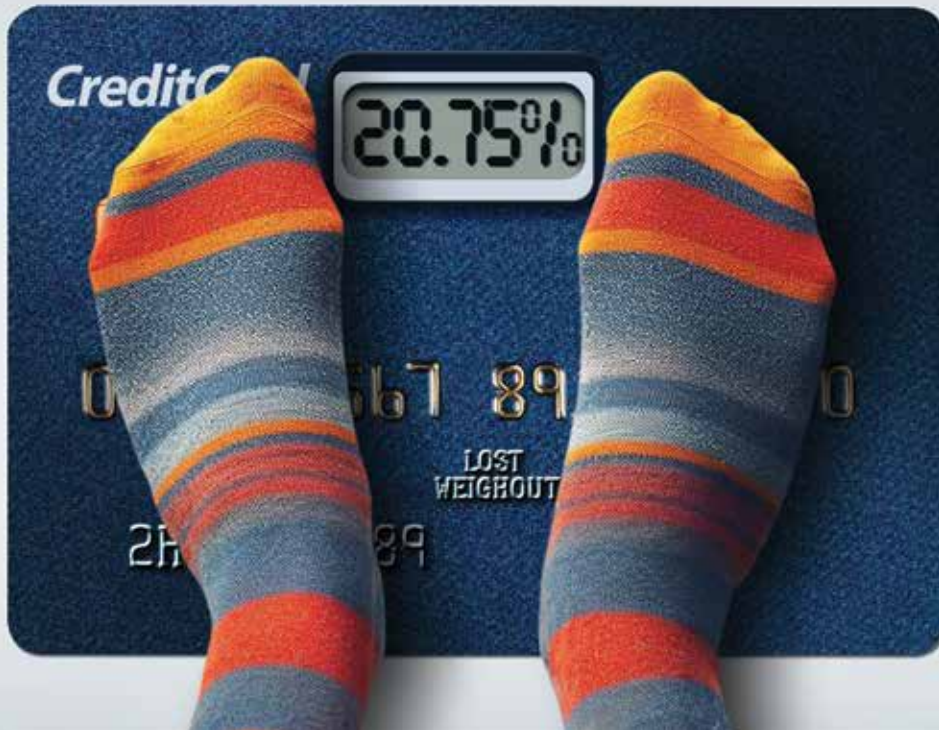
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**On the Cover:**

Rick Moliterno poses for a portrait in his shop Standard Byke Company, which is outfitted with several ramps.

*Katelyn Metzger*

# AI will transform the economy – and the labor market



**MARK GRYWACHESKI**

Economy

Mark Grywacheski is an expert in financial markets and economic analysis and is an investment adviser with Quad-Cities Investment Group, Davenport.

**T**hough still in its relative infancy, the rapid expansion of artificial intelligence (AI) is hard to ignore. Businesses around the world have increasingly embraced AI technologies to reduce their operating costs or to deliver new products and services to the consumer marketplace.

According to Bloomberg Intelligence, global spending on AI technology is expected to reach \$1.3 trillion by 2032, compared to just \$40 billion in 2022. This equates to a compound annual growth rate of 42% on AI spending. But how is this rapid expansion of technology expected to impact the labor market?

In a study by Goldman Sachs, it is estimated that AI could immediately replace the equivalent of 300 million jobs worldwide. Within the U.S., roughly two-thirds of all current jobs have some tasks that can be performed by AI. Most of these jobs have sizable exposure to AI, where 25%-50% of all tasks can be replaced. Moreover, roughly 25% of all current work in the U.S. could be fully replaced by AI.

Historically, advancements in technology have impacted lower-wage, manual, repetitive tasks the most. For example, machine automation on a factory floor or a financial institution using computers to process vast amounts of transactions in seconds. But research suggests that AI – which is used to mimic human thought and analysis – is expected to have a much greater impact on higher-waged, professional, white-collar employees.

The industry with the highest exposure to AI automation is Office & Administrative Support, where an estimated 46% of all tasks could be replaced with AI. The Legal profession ranks No. 2, where 44% of all work tasks could be replaced with AI. Rounding out the Top 5 industries at risk are No. 3 Architecture & Engineering (37%), followed by Life, Physical & Social Sciences (36%) and Business & Financial Operations (35%).

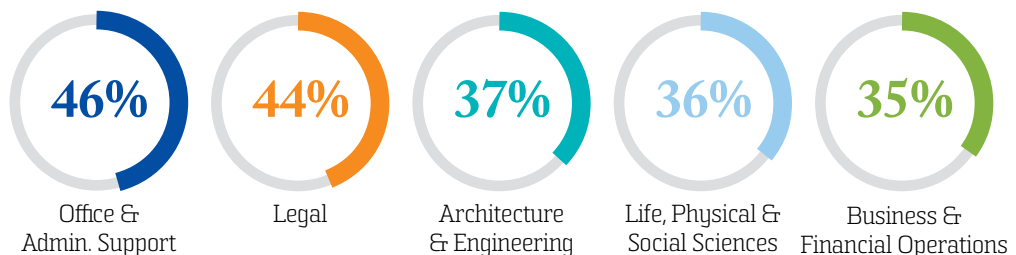
Conversely, the study indicates that physically intensive occupations are less likely to be replaced with AI technology. For example, just 1% of tasks in the Building &

Grounds Cleaning & Maintenance industry could be replaced by AI. Other industries with low exposure to AI are Installation, Maintenance & Repair (4%), Construction (6%), Production (9%) and Transportation (11%).

The displacement of workers by technology can be a delicate subject. But economic historians often cite the analogy of the combustion engine replacing the horse and buggy. Yes, horse and buggy jobs disappeared. But the technological advancement of the combustion engine spawned the assembly line, which transformed the automotive industry to produce more, and cheaper, cars and trucks. As the automotive industry flourished by creating enormous consumer demand, it created more jobs than its predecessor horse and buggy industry could ever possibly imagine. Entire new industries were created – auto dealerships, auto repair, parts & accessories, auto rental, insurance, financing – the list goes on.

Technological innovation is a necessary part of a growing and vibrant economy. Jobs that are lost in one industry tend to be picked up by emerging new industries. In a study of U.S. Census data by economist David Autor and coauthors, 60% of all workers currently employed in our country are in occupations that didn't exist in the 1940s. Thus, 85% of our nation's employment growth since then is the technology-driven creation of new industries and the new jobs they create.

## By industry, percentage of tasks that could be replaced by AI.....



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Class Heritage owner **Adrian English** shows off the beginning of a restoration project.

*Katelyn Metzger*

# 20 years of 'light' work

## Glass Heritage restores stained glass windows to their former glory

**GRETCHEN TESKE**

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**W**indows are a big part of how people view the world. Adrian English has dedicated his life to making sure the view is beautiful.

The owner of Glass Heritage LLC at 3030 Hickory Grove Road in Davenport, English works year-round to restore decorative windows in the community. The windows are appreciated all year long but when the sun is shining in the spring and summer, English's company is at its busiest while the weather is just right for the job.

"A lot of the work that we do is outside," he said. "We love doing smaller projects, but we cater to the bigger projects."

Locally, that has translated to windows all over the Quad-Cities and the George M. Curtis mansion in Clinton. The 1883 home was built for the famous lumber baron and features more than 40 stained glass windows.

In 2009, Glass Heritage took one of its largest projects to date: a 25-foot tall window designed by renowned Iowa artist Grant Wood. The only window Wood ever designed was in the first floor of the Veterans Memorial Building/City Hall building in Cedar Rapids when it was damaged by a severe flood.

That project "put us on the map" English said, but St. John's, Holy Family and First Presbyterian churches in Davenport have also been clients of his. Most of the time, the windows already exist and English's team restores them, bringing them back to life using old school techniques.



Smaller stained glass windows for sale hang in the lobby of Glass Heritage. *Katelyn Metzger*

"We're doing the same thing they did hundreds of years ago, so the process is still the same," he said.

The first step with restoration, he said, is removing the window and crating it for transportation; a task that seems daunting considering how large some windows appear.

"When you see these big, giant windows they're not just one window," English said. "They're broken up into multiple panels so you can remove them."

Next the team covers the spot where the window was, ensuring it's sealed to prevent moisture from seeping in.

"Once they're back in the studio we remove them from the crate and do photo documentation," English said. "We take photos back lit and front lit and the process starts after that."

It starts with what English refers to as a "rubbing": a tracing of the window. A worker will place a thin piece of paper over the window, then, using a crayon, will slowly trace each individual line, essentially creating a map of what the window looks like from a structural standpoint.

"That rubbing identifies any breakage in the panel, where the original reinforcement went. So it's a nice guide," he said. "But it does take a little bit of time depending on the complexity of the window."

The rubbing is then laid out on a table, awaiting the next step.

With the blueprint complete, a worker will take the window to a "water tank" that looks like a large table with walls up on all sides to keep the water in. The window is disassembled while submerged



**Jessie Cassidy** weatherproofs a restoration piece at Glass Heritage. *Katelyn Metzger*

to protect workers from harmful elements. "A big issue that we deal with in our industry is lead. A lot of these panels that come in, there's lead corrosion on them," English said.

The window is disassembled while under water and each individual piece is thoroughly cleaned. Once dry, the pieces are laid back onto the rubbing in a slow process that resembles putting a jigsaw puzzle back together.

If any pieces are missing, a worker will cut a piece to fit the space. But, English said, workers do their best to repair cracks and work with what they have in order to keep the piece authentic.

"We do try to keep as much original glass as possible," English said. "Truly that's the historic aspect of the window, is the glass."

Because there are so many different shades and hues of colors, it's impossible to match exactly. In the case of a cracked piece of glass, workers will fill in the cracks with lead. Because the entire window is made up of lead lines, it blends right in.

Some windows have sayings or words painted on them. If they become too

faded to read, the Glass Heritage team repaints it back to life before placing it back onto the rubbing before it moves onto the next step.

"At that point, the window is ready to reassemble," he said.

Once again, the window is moved piece by piece to a work table and leading is placed in between each individual glass shape to hold the window together. Then, a worker will solder each individual joint on both the front and back of the window, a process that can take days depending on the size.

With the window fully put back together, it moves over to another table where it is re-weatherproofed. The compound resembles a thick mud and is spread all over the window with a brush, pushed into the cracks and joints of the window to help strengthen and stabilize it.

"After this we detail the window," English said, adding it is a lengthy, painstaking process. "You're literally taking a pick and going around each individual piece of glass to clean off each residual piece of weatherproofing."

While its drying, reinforcement bars are soldered onto the window to give it even more support.

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"The final step is to take photographs again of the completed work, backlit and frontlit, and then you put it back in the crate and you bring it back to the jobsite and it falls right into place for us," he said.

Before the window is re-installed, the Glass Heritage crew cleans up the window opening on the building its going into. The trim is glazed, painted and weatherproofed to ensure the window will be secure and last, as well as the window frame itself.

Last year English's company completed about 60 projects — a number that may not seem daunting, but it all depends on the size and details in the window.

"They could be someone's cabinet door from their home or it could be like St. Raphael Cathedral. It could be a huge project," he said, referencing the Dubuque church with 14 massive stained glass windows depicting different saints.

The 1860s windows are among the oldest he has ever worked on.

This year marks 20 years in business for English, who found his love for the craft while in high school. Although the work is tedious and requires a significant amount of patience, the light through the

window — seeing the windows restored to their former glory — makes it all worth it.

"I just enjoy taking something that is in a terrible state ... and making it look new again. It's very rewarding," he said. "And, when I drive past a church I get to say, 'I did that. I worked on that.' There's a lot of careers where you can't see your work."

Once fully restored, the windows are expected to last 75-100 years, ensuring English will have many more years to be proud of what he sees.

"I'll be able to see them when I'm old and retired," he said with a laugh. "I just love restoration work. I think it's fun and rewarding."

Employee **Ryan McFate** pieces a window together. As he fits the stained glass together, he cuts new pieces of metal to later solder together. *Katelyn Metzger*



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# 'They want the best ones that are made'

## Standard Byke Company leads the BMX industry for 33 years and counting

**GRETCHEN TESKE**

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**R**ick Moliterno holds himself to the standard of excellence. He even named his company after it.

In 1991, he opened the doors to Standard Byke Company in his hometown of Davenport and it not only changed his life, but the industry as well. His love for BMX started it all.

That story began when he was 6 years old.

"Back in the day, we would all just turn our little (Schwinn) Sting-Rays into bikes you could jump and ride wheelies on," he said. "Go out until the street lights came on and then as we got a little older and a little later out, they started making BMX specific things in the mid-'70s and I just never quit."

The story, Moliterno says, is much longer and more complicated than that. But as the decades slowly rolled on and the '80s arrived, BMX boomed in popularity in the Quad-Cities.

"BMX is a weird little sport that goes up and down in popularity, but it was real big here on the race-side in the early '80s, and then in the late '80s it fell off a

bit," he said. "But freestyle, with all the trick riding, the street stunts and skatepark style started getting created and that really blew up."

Word spread through the Quad-Cities that BMX was on the rise and one Rock Island businessman made it his mission to support it. Steve DePron owned Bike & Hike on 14th Avenue in Rock Island for 49 years before retiring in summer 2023.

"He was my launchpad and huge financial support in the beginning," he said. "I didn't know he was new to it because he'd always been just Steve."

DePron was known for letting kids come up and get free air in their tires or order any parts they needed for their bikes. He even gave a young Moliterno a job in the shop and supported his BMX dreams by letting him wear the business name.

"He helped me get to where I went. I worked in there and he paid my way with different sponsoring," he said. "I rode for his shop team and I got bigger sponsorships through that."

Moliterno's hard work paid off and in the fall of 1982 he decided it was time to turn pro. The process, he said, was "kind of easy and kind of hard. If you think you're ready to turn pro and you do, you'll

get smashed right away if you're not ready. But its simple to do it. The qualifications are pretty simple."

On the racing side, pros had to be at least 16-years-old and competing at an expert level. Moliterno was 17 and excelling at the sport. The last step was to simply buy the pro membership.

On Nov. 7, 1982, Moliterno and a friend were in Cedar Rapids for a competition, when his friend decided to make the purchase. Moliterno, too, handed over the \$19 needed to cover his membership fee and his name was written in cursive on a slip of paper, certifying he was officially a BMX pro on the racing side of events.

"They make you carry it until you get your card," he said with a laugh. "They just tore it off the bottom of a piece of paper."

Going pro at 17 is young for BMX, he said, but he proved himself fairly quickly.

"I got first that day, too. I beat the dude I never thought I'd beat and I go, 'OK. Here I am,'" he said with a laugh. "Go to the race not expecting that and then you leave going, 'OK I guess it was time.' That was pretty cool."

For every other category, prospective pros had to enter a class and if they were good enough, the pro-membership was



Owner and founder of Standard Byke Company **Rick Moliterno** talks about his frustrations of finding a good BMX bike in the '90s. He took it upon himself to build the bike that he wanted.

*Katelyn Metzger*

the reward. While the road to becoming a BMX pro was fairly easy, it wasn't always popular. But not for lack of support, he said.

"There was no anti, people just weren't aware of it," he said. "Within the BMX community being pro is the highest level you can get to, so within that (community) it was popular."

It was not until BMX became known by the general population that people even knew there was such a thing as going pro, he said.

"It's still not like football or baseball or basketball or any of the big sports," he said.

But, like with athletes in other sports, Moliterno made a name for himself by pulling off stunts that seemed impossible to the average person.

"I was always doing stuff away from the track like jumping over stuff, off of buildings, doing all the craziness and that grew into a style called freestyle," he said. "We were doing flat ground tricks, ramp tricks and we'd go to shows by popular riders and I got noticed that way, was sent some goodies and next thing you know, I'm traveling the country."

A poster for a 1986 Hutch Trick Team

summer tour in Queens refers to him as "Rad Rick Moliterno. King of amazing aerial artistry."

While he was on the road perfecting his craft, BMX was growing back in the Quad-Cities. In 1989, Moliterno decided to capitalize on that and opened Rampage Skate Park on Kimmel Drive in Davenport.

The indoor park, which closed in 2005, was named the longest running skate park in the world and featured three wooden half-pipes, several quarter pipes in a range of heights and a vertical wall. This all led to rougher riding, he said, and the need for a



bike that could withstand the wear and tear. Being a leader in the BMX community, Moliterno knew he could solve this problem. But if he was going to do it, the bikes were going to be the best on the market and held to the standard of excellence — the inspiration behind the future company's name.

In November 1991 the doors to Standard Byke Company opened in Davenport. In the same building Moliterno started Goodtimes Superstore in 1995, the retail part of the business.

"None of the companies were doing anything to make the bikes better so it

was a need we tried to fill on our own," he said. "We did, it influenced everything and somehow we're still here."

Moliterno is modest about his beginnings but being a BMX legend with a famous skate park, he attracted the attention of BMX magazines and their staff writers. Competitions drew in competitors from all over and the lore about what was rolling in Davenport grew.

"I was in all the magazines monthly so I was well known. It was big news in the (BMX) community that we started the company so all eyes were upon us," he

said. "And then we happened to deliver, somehow. We stuck it out through all the hard times and here we are."

What sets the Standard bikes apart is not only how they are made, but why and who makes them. The bikes were built with durability in mind and by a man who knows everything there is to know about BMX.

"In the beginning the whole goal was to make them so they wouldn't break. That was successful, so then we attacked all the high-end needs and all the different aspects of riding," he said. "There's different ways

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(Opposite Left) **Joe Palen** pieces bike frame rods together at the Standard Byke Company production shop. (Opposite Right) Employee **Jarrett Schwarz**, of Schwarz Powder Coating, which is located in the Standard Byke Company shop, powder coats a BMX bike frame. *Katelyn Metzger*

to ride the bikes and those require different types of frames and setups so we addressed all those specific needs within it and make excellent bike models."

Even though BMX swings in popularity, Standard has stayed consistent with orders. That's good, Moliterno said, considering how small his staff is.

"We don't grow or shrink much. We stay about the same because of what we are," he said. "We are limited on how many we can make because there's only three of us."

Moliterno and his employees work in the back of his new shop along Rt. 84 N in East Moline where the company moved in 2019, a year after Moliterno was inducted into the BMX Hall of Fame.

The walls in the front part of the red building are lined with rows of bike frames. Off to the side racks of t-shirts, jackets, hats, stickers — anything a Standard Byke fan would need. A door close to the front desk leads to where Moliterno and his team make it all happen.

The workspace is big, with a loft wrapping around most of the room. Frames previously made by Standard are fastened to the loft railing; gifts from customers who wanted Moliterno to have the bikes they bought

from him years prior. Beneath it are massive ramps where Moliterno and the crew ride after work.

Behind the ramps and wrapping around the outer walls of the building, machinery lines the walls where the team builds the bikes by hand. Each bike is made individually, almost part by part. The first step is to create the front-end, then the rear using 430 steel, which Moliterno refers to as a "magical material."

The durable metal is what sets the bikes apart from others on the market, he said, and accomplishes his goal of selling the best bike on the market.

"People come to us to this day because they want the best ones that are made," he said.

Once the parts are complete the team assembles them in a process Moliterno describes as being similar to a "hot rod shop" where instead of turning out hundreds at a time, the trio make a smaller, more manageable amount, considering each bike is different.

"There's so many different types of bikes to ride within BMX and a lot of it is dictated by wheel size, person size and usage like racing or off-track," he said.

For an average BMX bike, assembly

can take as little as 45 minutes. Custom bikes, he said, can take up to 15 hours. Post-assembly, the bike moves down to a tent at the end of the workshop where Jarrett Schwarz, owner of Schwarz Powder Coating, does the paint.

Schwarz has been in business for himself since he was 19 years old and has worked out of the Standard workshop since back when it was in Davenport. In addition to the bikes, his business does powder coating for a variety of items such as car rims and motorcycles.

Once the bike is painted, a gel coating is applied to make it shine. The bike then goes into a large oven where the gel cures. Once its out, the rest of the details are done: lines are cleaned, brakes are added and a custom plate with a serial number is applied to the back.

All of these steps are fairly new to the company, Moliterno said. For the first 16 years of Standard's existence the bikes were manufactured in Wisconsin until he decided he wanted to bring operations in-house.

Moliterno hired the best workers he could find to manufacture the bikes and eventually learned how to use the machinery himself. This, he said, was never the goal when he started. He just wanted to solve a problem.

"I still think it's funny that we're still here," he said of his company. "It was started to fill a need and I just figured, 'Well maybe it'll be around two or three years.' We've been around 33 years."

With his small but mighty team, Moliterno and the crew crank out about 500 bikes a year on average. Once they're bikes are done, Standard ships them out both nationally and internationally.

Getting to this place of success with Standard is something Moliterno never saw coming. His journey to create excellence set a new standard and with 33 successful years under his tires, he's not giving up now.

"I like what we're doing. We'll just keep changing with the times and making our stuff the best that can be made," he said. "As long as that's the winning formula and it's fun to do we'll keep doing it."



BMX bike frames sit on display in the Standard Byke Company lobby in East Moline. *Katelyn Metzger*



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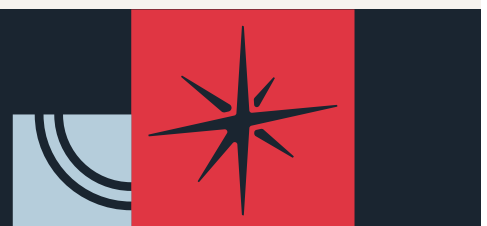
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Hot tubs are filled with water and tested for about four hours before the cabin is installed around the tub.

*Katelyn Metzger*

## QCA Pools and Spas makes a splash with Iowa-made products

### GRETCHEN TESKE

gteske@qctimes.com

**M**anufacturing jobs are not typically thought of as relaxing, but the team at QCA Pools and Spas are experts in the field.

Whether someone is looking for a two-person hot tub or wanting to get ready to host a party for eight, the Quad-Cities-based company has nearly 60 years of experience in relaxation and rejuvenation.

It started in 1966 as Quad Cities Automatic Sprinkler, in the brick building at 343 13th St. in Bettendorf. A few years later, the company started taking on pool

work, said Jim Ketelsen, vice president of retail.

By the late '70s, the company had expanded to manufacturing its own spas, using multiple buildings in downtown Bettendorf to complete all the steps. In 2008, the company moved manufacturing under one roof by moving into its own factory in DeWitt, about 25 miles north.

The company still retains a presence in downtown Bettendorf, however, with a showroom that features a variety of products, from chemicals to accessories to spas and saunas. Overall, the company employs about 70 people and 30 of those workers are in the factory performing a variety of jobs.

The first task is picking out the right color. "It all starts with a flat piece of acrylic," Ketelsen said. "What we do is fit this into an oven, also known as a thermoform machine, and we heat it up and vacuum form it into a spa mold."

The sheets come in two sizes, 100"x100" and 90"x90", and come in five different colors. The sheet is placed into the thermoform, where it is heated up to 390 degrees. Once the sheet is pliable, a machine lowers it into a pre-made fiberglass mold.

QCA Pools and Spas has more than 30 different molds for customers to choose from, varying in size, shape and custom details. Tiny holes in the molds — air channels — pull the heated acrylic down

and vacuum shrink it to take the shape of the mold.

After the thermoform treatment, the shell goes into another oven where its kept warm. After, it's taken to a booth where Durabond, a hardening compound, is applied.

"It's what gives the shell strength because it's pretty fragile when it comes out of the oven," Ketelsen said.

After, a layer of foam insulation is applied and the shell is painted. It is then taken to another area where employees drill the holes for the plumbing and jets.

Next, the spa moves to the plumbing department, where the PVC lines and jets are attached.

The shells are left to sit overnight and the next day they move into the construction area where employees have pre-built the cabinet — the wooden frame — the hot tubs sit in. The pumps and electronic panels are then applied before a forklift carries the spa to the test rack.

Once on the rack, they are filled with water and set to run for two to four hours, Ketelsen said. Everything from the jets to the LED light features to the joints and pumps are monitored to make sure they are in working order.

"What I like talking about is that all of these are sold," said Ketelsen, motioning to the bubbling spas. "We don't build for inventory, we build for orders. Maybe it's not sold to an end user yet, but a retail store or company has ordered them and that's considered sold to me."

QCA Pools and Spas have three retail stores in Iowa, in Bettendorf, Cedar Rapids



(Above) A sheet of acrylic is cleaned and heated before being molded into a hot tub. (Right) **Jim Kettleson** shows off the different sheets of acrylic that will be later molded into a hot tub or spa.

*Katelyn Metzger*



and Dubuque, and a fourth in Green Bay, Wisconsin. In an average month, 150 spas are going out the doors of the DeWitt factory, said company President Bob Zerull.

But that is all dependent on the time of year. Typically, January and February are slow, but dealers begin placing their orders once the first signs of spring arrive.

By the time fall rolls around, spas are flying off the shelves. Zerull said the company has been working to expand its

reach and has gone international, with spas being shipped as far as Egypt.

Before they can get there, they have to come off the rack. A forklift takes the spa to another work area where an employee clears the water out of the lines and gets it ready for completion.

A look in QCA Spas manufacturing location in DeWitt. *Katelyn Metzger*



Before water is added, the spas can weigh anywhere from

**400-  
1,000  
pounds**

"From there it gets detailed up, nice and clean and dry, and out to our warehouse for packing," Ketelsen said.

In the packaging department, the spas are wrapped in protective plastic and placed on pallets, ready to be put on a tractor-trailer. Large racks extend from floor to ceiling with large grey and black packages on them, holding the covers for the spas.

"For as many models we have, we have to have a lot of covers. So they're pretty much everywhere," Ketelsen said.

On the floor near the door are a series of boxes individually labeled and grouped together, featuring another product made in DeWitt.

Spas may be the main event in the factory, but the crew has one more trick up its sleeves: they are the only US manufacturer of infrared saunas. Their brand, TheraSauna, is also made in DeWitt, while competitors all make their products overseas.

"These guys build every one individually and put it together. It's not like we make 50 front doors and put them in a box," he said. "This is built here and all the pieces are boxed to go to your house. So your sauna was built and assembled here first."

## Spas are sometimes referred to as Jacuzzis,

which is actually a brand name. The Jacuzzi family immigrated to the United States from Italy in the early 1900s and made a name for themselves as inventors. In 1956, a family member came down with arthritis, prompting the Jacuzzi brothers to develop a portable pump that would turn a bathtub into a spa. By 1968, Roy Jacuzzi perfected the craft and invented the world's first integrated whirlpool bath.

The saunas come in two colors, natural and mahogany, and are made of aspen, because it is known to be a pure wood. Other woods, like cedar or hemlock, can release toxins and cause negative effects for sauna users.

"There's a lot of chemically sensitive people in the world, so we make this to be toxic free, or almost toxic free, lumber," he said. "That's part of our reputation."

Once the saunas are put together and tested, they are taken apart and put into individual boxes to head out to the shipping area. They will be shipped directly to the

customer for them to assemble — a task not as daunting as it seems.

"It is very easy to assemble, there are only 14 bolts that hold it together," Ketelsen said. "The hardest part is getting it out of the package."

The hardest workers, however, may just be the ones in DeWitt. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, sales doubled and crews easily handled the surge while maintaining a high standard for the products.

"We do all that right here in DeWitt and we're pretty proud of that," Ketelsen said.



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The first ice cream machine made for Dairy Queen by Electro Freeze.

*Katelyn Metzger*

# The start of soft serve

## How an East Moline company has been part of ice cream history for 78 years

### GRETCHEN TESKE

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**A**round the world people consume ice cream daily, generally paying attention to flavor and label.

For people grabbing a cone at a restaurant or fast-food chain, there's a chance the machine making the treat has a Quad-Cities connection in the East Moline-based company Electro Freeze.

It all started in the early 1930s, when manufacturing in the Quad-Cities was heating up. About that time, Henry Duke of Owensboro, Kentucky, made the move to East Moline looking for work. He ended up at the Troy Laundry Equipment

Company repairing washing machines. The company later became a division of AMETEK Inc.

By the end of the decade Duke decided to go into business for himself, building commercial grade washing machines for dry cleaners. By 1945, Duke built up enough business to build his own factory at 623 15th Ave. in East Moline, said John Sacco, the retired Director of Administration for Electro Freeze.

The yellow brick building, next to Jaded Java, still has the H.C. Duke name on the front.

About 10 miles to the east in Green River, Illinois, father and son duo J.F. and Alec McCullough began experimenting with a new soft serve creation. To mass

produce it, the duo purchased the rights to a custard-type freezer, which relied on ice and salt for the freezing process, from Harry Oltz of Hammond, Indiana.

With their recipe ready to go, the McCulloughs contacted a good friend and customer, Sherb Noble, and asked him to run an "all you can eat" trial run of their new creation at his Kankakee, Illinois, store on Aug. 4, 1938.

Within two hours Noble served up 1,600 helpings of the then unnamed dessert.

The group spent the next two years perfecting their recipe and Noble opened their first store on June 22, 1940, in Joliet, Illinois. J.F. McCullough believed his product was the "queen" of the crop so to speak and named the new store Dairy Queen.

It was an instant success and the McCullough's built the first drive-in Dairy Queen at 4320 Fourth Ave. in Moline the following year. The blue building is still standing and is now home to Coya's Cafe.

As time progressed, the washing machine business continued to thrive and so did the craze for the new soft-serve treat being served up in the Quad-Cities. In 1946, Duke was contacted by the founders of Dairy Queen and asked if he could help them with a problem.

"They had repairs needed on the machines because the machines were made by another company. Us being in the manufacturing business, we did repairs for them on their ice cream machine," Sacco said. "They came one day to the Dukes and said, 'Do you think you can build an ice cream machine?'"

The Dukes were happy to try, and it was a success. The partners came back and ordered 10 more.

"They never knew if they'd see another order for ice cream machines or not, but from there they continued building ice cream machines for Dairy Queen exclusively," Sacco said.

Success continued and by the 1960's the H.C. Duke & Son company expanded

its product line with the invention of a slush machine. The company was ready to expand again in 1967, this time at its new home at 2116 8th Ave. in East Moline, where it stands today.

Two years later the company purchased the New York-based company Electro Freeze, which specialized in gravity machines. The dairy mix would be poured into the top of the machine, fall down the barrel and freeze.

The Duke company was creating pressurized machines, where a pump would push the mix in and incorporate the air into the ice cream to create the soft-serve blend people craved.

"We took our technology of pressurized machines and incorporated it into that line of Electro Freeze equipment and started selling pressurized machines on the open market and we were one of the first companies to do that," Sacco said.

Soft-serve ice cream needs less air than other batches, Sacco said, but it needs to be controlled. The new technology allowed for a firmer, and higher-quality product and the trend of improvement and innovation continued for decades.

"As a company, since we bought Electro Freeze, we built a lot of new things for the industry," he said. "The pressurized machine was one in 1970 and in 1972 we came out with what was called a cab machine."

The cab allowed the pump to be refrigerated, ensuring the dairy-filled ice cream mix was more sanitary. Before the cab, machine owners would have to clean their machines daily. The refrigeration made sure the product stayed at a safe temperature and the machine only needed to be cleaned once a week.

As the times shifted, so did H.C. Duke & Son, which has since adopted the Electro Freeze name. The company now makes machines for a variety of frozen creations, including cocktails, shakes, slush, water ice and gelato.

Always looking for the latest scoop on the industry, Electro Freeze hit it big in 1984 with the invention of the blizzard machine.

"It increased their sales tremendously and we now sell it on the open market as an Artic Swirl machine," Sacco said.

In 2003, the Duke family sold the company to the Ali Group, an Italian

manufacturing firm and one of the largest food service equipment suppliers in the world. The new funding and experience helped Electro Freeze expand its product line and customer base.

"It was huge for us because this company, from when they first bought us to when I retired (in 2021) there was about six to seven times the amount of volume (as before)," Sacco said. "And that was still 10 times the volume from when I started here."

When Sacco began his career in 1975 the company was churning out four to five machines a day, he said. Now the company is making as many as 3,000 in a single year, said President Victoria Campbell.

Even though she grew up in Bettendorf, Campbell had never heard of the H.C. Duke company before a local headhunter inquired with her about the job. Once she made it to the East Moline factory, the decision to come aboard was easy, she said.

"I came over here and was very impressed with the operation. There is a lot of really good people here who care deeply about what we make and the impact we make," she said.

That impact is felt locally with companies like Lagomarcino's and Los Amigos featuring Electro Freeze products in their stores, and also nationally. Major chains like Sonic, Five Guys, Arby's and the ice cream truck Mister Softee all purchase Electro Freeze machines.

Making it all happen, Campbell said, are about 170 employees. When Sacco started in 1975, employment was at about 50 people, he said.

"I really love the people here," Campbell said. "They care. They want to solve problems. They will go out of their way to make the product right, and that's what makes Electro Freeze great is because we're known for that quality and that starts with the people on our floor."

Now, the team has grown and so has the company and what it makes in-house. Everything from the design to testing to service and shipping all takes place in one building, "cross country and across the world," Campbell said.

Electro Freeze is not just a big name in North America — it has 28 distributors in the US and Canada — but also in the United Kingdom and a big presence in



(Top Left) An older Electro Freeze machine. (Bottom Left) About 170 employees work in the East Moline manufacturing plant. *Katelyn Metzger*



A few of the different ice cream machines that Electro Freeze produces.  
*Katelyn Metzger*

Poland. A favorite treat among Europeans is Swiderki, a soft serve style from Poland known for being nearly a foot tall.

The specialty comes in a dairy and fruit variety, but does not have any air in the product making it very dense. Multiple

companies have tried to create the machine but could not handle the thick texture. Electro Freeze was able to take the design to the drawing boards and create a machine that would produce it best.

Innovations are a big part of what keeps Electro Freeze growing, Campbell said, and they just keep coming. In 2013, Electro Freeze came out with a machine that has electronic controls, allowing the company to diagnose problems over the internet. The new machines can sense what time of day is typically busier for a company and idle in the down-time, conserving energy.

"We're continuing to improve that and making changes to improve as the technology improves," Campbell said.

It's impossible to name all the machines

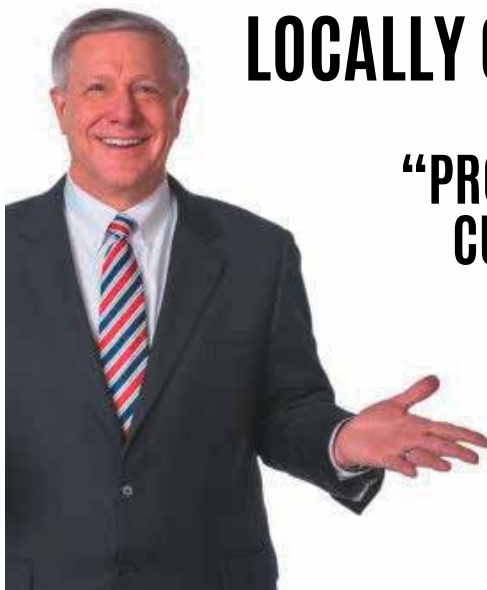
Electro Freeze makes, she said. At any given time they have about 150 being made and production typically takes about three weeks per machine. There are nearly 800 different combinations of Electro Freeze products from slushie machines to shake machines to the soft-serve that started it all.

At the end of the day, the product going out the door and to customers who will appreciate it is what makes both Campbell and Sacco proud to represent the company. After all, who doesn't love a cone of soft serve on a hot day?

"I always say nobody has a bad day when they eat ice cream. Everybody walks away with a smile," Sacco said. "Being able to make a product that people sit down and enjoy, that always meant the world to me."

## Before Electro Freeze was purchased by H.C. Duke & Son LLC, it had a rich history in the ice cream business.

In the late '50s Electro Freeze developed the first twist-machine: half vanilla and half chocolate. With limited success in town, they partnered up with chocolate company Toblerone to make an ice cream mix. Electro Freeze took the machine and recipe to the 1964 World's Fair in New York and business exploded. Within six months Electro Freeze sold more than 1 million twist cones.



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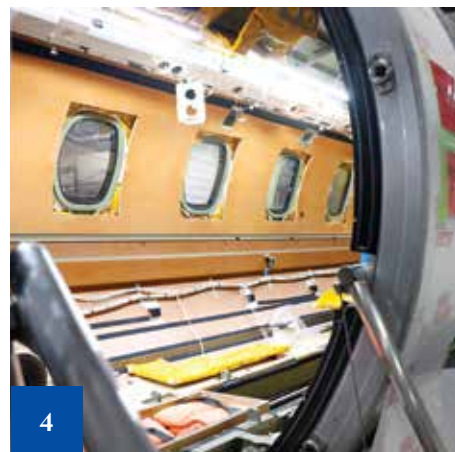


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# Elliott Aviation serves Quad-Cities skies



**E**lliott Aviation, which was founded by Herb Elliott in 1936, offers aviation services to the Quad-Cities area. From its base at the Quad Cities International Airport, Elliott offers aircraft sales, exterior paint jobs, avionics service & installations, general maintenance, interior redesign and fixed-based operator services.



- 1.** Currently, there are about 200 employees in Moline and Elliott is currently hiring aircraft mechanics and avionic, paint and interior technicians. **2.** The cockpit of a newly refurbished Falcon 2000. Elliott Aviation, which was founded in 1936, specializes in maintenance upgrades, avionics, interiors, and exterior paint. The Moline-based company primarily focuses on small to mid-sized jets. **3.** Wooden shelving is made to specifications for a galley. **4.** Interiors of planes that are consistently used need to be refurbished about every two years, whereas exterior paint jobs need to be redone about every 10 years. **5.** A propeller inscribed with Elliott Aviation decorates the Moline lobby. **6.** A look in Elliott Aviation's mechanics and avionics hangar. **7.** An Elliott Aviation employee traces out pieces of leather to be cut and sewn into a seat cover. Almost all aspects of interior design can be made to any specifications including type of materials, lighting, colors and wood stains. **8.** Moline is the only facility housing a fixed-based operator (FBO), which means it can offer services such as hangaring, fueling, flight instruction and plane rentals. *Katelyn Metzger*



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# 5 unique items the Rock Island Arsenal has made

**GRETCHEN TESKE**

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**T**he Rock Island Arsenal is home to more than 80 organizations that provide products and services to the armed forces. Over the years it has also been home to multiple factories providing goods and materials for the Army and beyond.

## 1. ARMY LEATHER PRODUCTION

Between 1880 and 1920, Rock Island Arsenal was the largest producer of leather products in the world. Employees made everything from saddles and harness to slings, belts, boxes and cases of various shapes and sizes.

From 1875 to 1921, the Arsenal was the leading producer of leather goods for the Army, including the production and remanufacturing of Army saddles. Following the Spanish-American War, the Arsenal remanufactured Col. Theodore Roosevelt's Rough Rider saddles.

In 1875, an infantry equipment board adopted the cartridge box invented by then First Lieutenant Samuel McKeever. Its unique design

of opening like a clam shell made the cartridges easy to reach.

Rock Island Arsenal produced 8,175 McKeever cartridge boxes from July 1, 1888 to June 30, 1889. The McKeever cartridge box was primarily a garrison item, with both the cavalry and infantry using the prairie belt or woven cartridge belt for field use.

Eventually the McKeever cartridge box was replaced by the Mills cartridge belt in 1895, but was made until 1910. From Jan. 1, 1888 until June 10, 1890, McKeever received a royalty of 20 cents for every McKeever cartridge box made at Rock Island Arsenal and other arsenals.



A saddle bag made on the Rock Island Arsenal is currently on display at the Rock Island Arsenal Museum. *Courtesy of the Rock Island Arsenal Museum*



## 2. WHITE HOUSE SECURITY FENCING

At the request of the Secret Service, the Arsenal got to work creating "anti-jump" fencing for the White House in 2015. The "removable anti-climb feature consisting of sharp metal points" was fabricated by the Arsenal's Joint Manufacturing and Technology Center, according to a

news release at the time.

The feature was designed by the Secret Service and produced at the Arsenal, "the Army's only full-scale metal manufacturer." Personnel from the JMTC were flown to Washington, D.C., to install the parts.

Extra spikes were added to the fencing surrounding the White House in 2015. The spikes were manufactured and installed by employees at the Rock Island Arsenal. *Courtesy of the Rock Island Arsenal Museum*



Employees at the Rock Island Arsenal are responsible for the Army's first 100 produced tanks.  
*Courtesy of the Rock Island Arsenal Museum*

### 3. TANKS

The Mark VIII tank, was assembled on the Arsenal between 1919 and 1920. It weighed more than 80,000 pounds, held a crew of eight and had a range of about 50 miles.

All of the Army's design, experimentation and production of tanks were housed at the Arsenal between 1919 and 1940. The first 100 produced for the Army were made directly on the Arsenal. The other 25 were assembled in Britain by the North British Locomotive Company.

Assembly at the Arsenal began on July 1, 1919, and took approximately 286 days to complete. The last Mark VIII tank assembled at Rock Island Arsenal was completed and ready for drive testing on June 5, 1920.

Nicknamed the "Liberty Tank" after its engine, the Mark VIII was capable of sluggish speeds up to five miles per hour utilizing its 300 horsepower Liberty V-12 engine, according to Army archives.

### 4. MANHATTAN PROJECT SUPPORT

The development of the atomic bomb was a monumental moment in American history that the Rock Island Arsenal was a part of. During World War II, the Arsenal provided support to the Manhattan Project in the form of electro-mechanical bomb components to aid the efforts at Los Alamos.

Following the war, the Arsenal produced the armored steel casings for the Mark-III and Mark-IV atomic bomb casings to the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC). These were reengineered versions of the "Fat Man" bomb dropped on Nagasaki.



The Arsenal's involvement in the Manhattan Project was classified, which has resulted in very little in the way of documentation and photographs of any of the projects. The bomb casings were more than likely constructed in Building 208, pictured here. The other electrical components were made at different places on the Arsenal. *Courtesy of the Rock Island Arsenal Museum*

### 5. JUICERS

Not only were Arsenal employees making weapon and war-related items, they were also producing every day items for soldiers. One of those were hand operated, heavy-duty fruit juice extractors.

Production ran from 1946-48, with the bulk of them, 3,596, produced in 1947. The Foundry Division made the

castings for this manufacturing project of the Artillery Vehicle Department of Rock Island Arsenal.

The Army, among its many responsibilities, operates kitchens/cafeterias/mess halls to feed soldiers. These juicers were used in these kitchens to provide fresh juice to soldiers.

A total of 3,746 aluminum juice extractors were produced at the Rock Island Arsenal between 1946 and 1948. The Foundry Division made the castings for this manufacturing project of the Artillery Vehicle Department of Rock Island Arsenal. *Courtesy of the Rock Island Arsenal Museum*





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# 5 lesser-known products John Deere made in the Quad-Cities

**GRETCHEN TESKE**

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**I**t is no secret John Deere is the Quad-Cities' biggest employer, with more than 8,500 people on the payroll.

Less known, however, is all the things the company has made over the years in addition to tractors and farm equipment.

Over the years Deere has made a plethora of surprising items, from children's toys to snowmobiles to bicycles.

Keeping track of all these items is the job of Neil Dahlstrom, branded properties and heritage manager for the John Deere Archives. According to his research, Deere employees were hard at work everywhere, especially in the Quad-Cities, making a variety of unique items.

## 1. EMPLOYEE HOUSING

John Deere as we know today moved to Moline in 1848 and over the next several decades the company began to grow. By the turn of the 20th century, there was a shortage of employee housing.

Between 1910 and 1923, Deere built 80 houses and two apartment complexes in East Moline and Moline. By 1912, the first 50 single-family houses were ready for occupancy.

Several of them were built on the east side of 13th Street in East Moline, directly across from the Union Malleable Iron Co. factory. The building was later

known as the John Deere Malleable Works, near the current day John Deere Harvester Works.

After the outbreak of World War I, additional houses and apartment buildings were built to sell and for rent to employees. Many of the homes are still standing and occupied to this day.



With a shortage of employee housing in the Quad-Cities, John Deere found a way to help. Pictured is the home of Mr. H.W. Pendleton in the 2500 block of 13th Street, Moline. It was owned or financed by Deere & Company Moline Residence Company in 1918. *Courtesy of John Deere*



## 2. JD570 MOTOR GRADER

Until the JD570 was introduced in 1967, road graders were straight framed machines with solid rear axles, used for grading and leveling roads. The JD570, built at the John Deere Davenport Works, was the industry's

first grader with an articulated frame.

It was also the industry's first grader with a cab and canopy with an integral rollover protection structure (ROPS) direct from the factory.

Shown is a JD 570 Motor Grader, the industry's first articulated grader, which was introduced in 1967. *Courtesy of John Deere*



### 3. EXPERIMENTAL TRACTORS

Before John Deere's Waterloo Boy tractor debuted in 1918, East Moline was home to early experimental tractor development. From 1912-1918, Deere developed a variety of tractor concepts.

They were typically named after the lead engineer on each machine, which included Charles Melvin, Max Sklovsky and Joseph Dain. Only one of these made it to production.

Approximately 90-100 all-wheel drive tractors, also known as the Dain, were built in 1918 and possibly into 1919.

Today one is on display at the John Deere Pavilion in Moline.

John Deere's first experimental tractor was designed by Charles Melvin in 1912.

*Courtesy of John Deere*

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#### 4. GILPIN SULKY PLOW

Prior to 1875, plowing was a hefty task for farmers. Operators would have to get off their seat and manually lift the plow out of the ground to move it to the next row.

The Gilpin Sulky Plow, named after its designer Gilpin Moore, was introduced in 1875 and built at the John Deere Plow Works in Moline. The new plow introduced a mechanical foot lift, giving the driver the ability to lift the plow out of and back into the ground simply by depressing a foot pedal.

It became one of the company's most successful new products of the 19th century after it defeated 50 other plows in a field trial at the Paris Universal Exposition in Paris, France, in 1878.



This rendering shows John Deere watching the Gilpin Sulky Plow in action. *Courtesy of John Deere*



Women complete drilling, riveting and assembly into sub-assemblies for the Grumman T.B.F. Avenger torpedo destroyer at John Deere Harvester Works in 1943. *Courtesy of John Deere*

#### 5. WORLD WAR I/II PRODUCTION

During both World War I and World War II, John Deere's Quad Cities factories fulfilled contracts to produce everything from ambulance carts and submarine components to utility trailers and a variety of airplane components, and more.

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The Iowa 80 Truckstop is the largest truck stop in the world.  
*Katelyn Metzger*



# 60 years on 80

## Iowa 80 Truck Stop celebrates decades of dedication to trucking and community

**GRETCHEN TESKE**  
gteske@qctimes.com

**W**alcott, Iowa, is home to the World's Largest Truck Stop, but it could be argued the truck stop is home to Walcott.

Before the Moon family came to town, Walcott was little more than farmland with an interstate being built near it. Not until a site selector from Kansas City came to town did things begin to change.

The legend of the truck stop begins with Bill Moon, a man who had a vision before there was much of a town to build one in.

"As they were building the interstate system he was siting Standard Oil truck stops," said his daughter Delia Meier,

senior vice president of the Iowa 80 Group Inc. which now owns and operates the truck stop and its affiliate businesses. "In the Midwest, he site selected and built them in the '60s and this one opened in May of '64."

Moon called it the Iowa 80 Truckstop and had an operator and restaurant on site. The couple who operated the stop lived in a trailer and intended for it to be their retirement plan, but the stop became much busier than they expected.

The following year, Moon and his wife, Carolyn, bought the stop and moved their family from Kansas City to Walcott to start their dream of being business owners.

Construction on the Interstate 80 Mississippi River Bridge, which connects LeClaire, Iowa, to Rapids City, Illinois,

was still underway. Drivers had to take an alternate exit, driving through the Quad Cities and over the Centennial Bridge. The I-80 bridge was ultimately completed in 1967, directing traffic right through Walcott.

"Every year that went by there would be more of 80 done, and of course that made traffic better and more consistent," Meier said.

With a higher traffic count came a higher demand for amenities. The restaurant that started with 25 counter seats was expanded. Next came two bays for tire service, a wrecker (towing) branch, a scale to weigh the trucks and a tire repair shop.

A store followed and was stocked with oil, windshield wipers and other items typically carried at gas stations, Meier said. Before long that began to include



stereotypical trucker items like hats, belts, jeans and boots.

"Over the years we just kept expanding and now we're carrying truck parts, things to fix up your truck, clothing and gifts," she said.

The demand for gifts helped jumpstart the moniker of World's Largest Truck Stop that Iowa 80 is known for today. In the 1980s, the station sold Amoco Fuel and was advertised as the world's largest Amoco station.

During her summers off from college, Meier worked in the store and often heard from customers who were looking for something that read "world's largest truck stop." At the time, they had no idea if that was true. Their status as the world's largest Amoco was given to them by the fuel company.

"I just held onto that and said, 'Are we?'" she said. "We started looking around and my dad traveled all the time to truck stops, was part of the association and said, 'Yeah. We are the world's largest truck stop.'"

The group now also owns a truck stop in Joplin, Missouri, and another in Kenly, North Carolina.

"They're probably the second and the third largest," Meier said with a laugh.

With the new nickname secured, more and more people flocked to the truck stop. It not only became a novelty stop for people on road trips but word spread about it being an oasis for drivers who needed a one-stop destination while traveling.

(Above) The truck stop, which sits on over 200 acres, is home to a dentist, chiropractor, museum, laundromat and dog wash. (Below) The Iowa 80 Truckstop sees about 5,000 people through its doors each day. *Katelyn Metzger*



In 1997, the Iowa 80 Group adapted to drivers' needs yet again and developed a catalog business where drivers could order parts carried in the store and pick them up on the way.

"We would take orders in the morning on the phone or open the mail and then run downstairs to the store to pack the order. That was the afternoon," she said. "In 2000, we decided to make it a business and not just an ancillary part of the store."

That has turned into Iowa80.com, an online superstore for trucking parts and accessories. The business has grown

so much a new distribution center was opened in January to support it.

The expansions lent themselves to not just things, but amenities. On the Iowa 80 campus are private showers that come free with the purchase of fuel, a laundromat, chapel, movie and TV room, exercise room, dentist, chiropractor and a barber shop.

"For us, we say if you do everything here on your time off while you're off on the road, when you're home you can devote 100% to your family or your hobby or your dog or whatever it is that you want to do," she said.



The Iowa 80 Truckstop, which was started in Walcott in 1964, is celebrating 60 years in business. *Katelyn Metzger*

As the decades went by, the truck stop continued to grow under Moon's leadership. Following his death in 1992, the growth continued as his family worked hard to follow the plan he laid out.

"It took us probably 10 years to finish the plan that he had," Meier said. "If your projects can keep going for 10 years not because nobody's working on them but because we're working hard on them, I don't know a better visionary story than that."

One of those was the idea of a museum.

"My dad was collecting the trucks and the toys and he wanted to build a museum so he could putter around in it in his retirement," Meier said.

Eventually, the museum came to fruition. It teaches the story of how trucking has evolved over the years. From Memorial Day to Labor Day, the museum is open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Saturday and from noon to 5 p.m. on Sundays, with free admission every day.

Finding new reasons for people to stop on their drives is a theme for the Iowa 80 Group. In 1994, another big addition to the growing empire came to town: fast food. While the restaurant continued to thrive, truckers were feeling the pressure from their companies to not spend as

much time at stops and get back on the road as fast as possible.

"What was happening in the trucking industry is there was more and more pressure on productivity so they didn't have time to eat at a restaurant and get a full meal," she said. "To be able to serve people in a minute is what our customers were needing to get back on the road."

Wendy's was the first to join the complex and eventually Taco Bell did, too. Drivers have a group of fifth-graders to thank for that addition, Meier said.

"I was teaching Junior Achievement and the kids are 11 years old and were talking about the truck stop. They've all been here of course and they love Wendy's and this and that and one class in particular said, 'You need a Taco Bell,'" she said with a laugh. "It was really that class that got me thinking about it."

Dairy Queen/Orange Julius, Chester's Chicken, Pizza Hut, Blimpie and Caribou Coffee & Einstein Bros. Bagels are now all at the stop as well.

A recent addition to the food offerings at Iowa 80 are fresh foods and grab-and-go meals.

Several years ago the laws changed that required truckers to take a break after 10 hours. Because most are paid by the

mile, they prefer to drive the entire time and only stop when absolutely necessary, Meier said.

"Once their day starts nothing stops it, so it puts that pressure on their meal time and their stops," she said. "Everything has to be more efficient and faster because time is money."

The store at the truck stop started stocking fresh fruit, pre-made sandwiches, salads and microwavable foods. Most drivers have a refrigerator and microwave in their vehicles, she said, and can make or store food on the go.

With the mandated breaks coming into play, the Iowa Group started thinking about how it could better serve drivers who were staying over night.

"If you have a big, mandated break, make sure you're at Iowa 80 because there's a lot of things to do," she said. "There's a lot of shopping, we can do your service work, we can wash your truck, we can wash your dog. We're adding a dog park right now."

The truck stop is still family owned and operated, with multiple family members taking on roles in the operation. There are plenty of other people working there as well, with it having grown to almost 500 employees.

If her father were alive today, he would be proud not only that his truck stop grew from 30 employees to nearly 500, but about who those employees are, Meier said.

"I think he would be really proud and amazed," she said. "He would be particularly proud that there are still some people who work here that knew him, even though he's been gone 32 years, that his team all stuck with us."

General Manager Mike Hutchinson, for instance, started working at Iowa 80 at 14 years old as a truck washer. Now, he runs the place.

The appreciation within Iowa 80 reaches beyond the walls and extends to both the community and the customers, Meier said. Since 1979 the truck stop has been hosting the Walcott Truckers Jamboree.

"We get 350-400,000 people here over those three days," she said.

Last year the truck stop hit a record with 444,000 visitors.

This year the jamboree takes place July 11-13 and includes a truck beauty contest where goers can take a look into trucks and see the alterations drivers have done over the years. A porkchop cookout

with bands, trucking Olympics and a dog contest round it all out, giving the community a chance to learn and truckers a chance to see their impact.

"It's just a time to have fun, for drivers to show their families what trucking is all about and for the general public to come and see what trucking is all about," Meier said. "That's how it started is as an appreciation event, and that's what it is."

It's an appreciation for the industry, the drivers who work countless hours and for Bill Moon — who quite literally put Walcott on the map.

"When they first moved here, it wasn't on the Rand McNally map. They didn't even bother to put Walcott down," Meier said. "It took my dad several years of lobbying to get them to put Walcott on."

Six decades later and there's not a map without it.



The Iowa 80 Trucking Museum restores and preserves antique trucks.

*Katelyn Metzger*

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Chef Jeff Grunder can be seen behind a stack of plates smiling at a joke. *Katelyn Metzger*

## Heart of America Group feeds the Quad-Cities and beyond with legacy businesses

**GRETCHEN TESKE**

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**M**ike Whalen has never been a chef, but he has fed hundreds of thousands of people over the years.

As the co-founder of the Heart of America Group, Whalen and his wife Kim are responsible for Quad-Cities

favorites like Fifth Avenue Syndicate and J Bar. Before he expanded into upscale dining, it all began with simple roots at a small restaurant on the outskirts of Davenport.

A Quad-Cities native, Whaley said he "didn't think he'd be living (in Iowa) today." His father was a sole practitioner lawyer in Davenport who took on many different interests. Among his father's endeavors was investing in real estate.

"One of those investments, and I don't know why, was he owned a restaurant building," Whalen said.

The space at 7250 Northwest Boulevard in Davenport was home to a coffee shop called Yummy's for a few years until the company went belly up. With an \$8,000 mortgage, the building was hard for his father to offload.

Whalen, in the meantime, was living in Massachusetts as a full-time student

finishing his last year at Harvard Law School. One night his dad shared the trouble he was having with the building, and Whalen offered to help.

"I said, 'I'll tell you what. I'll open a restaurant, and get it going after I graduate from law school and that will pay the mortgage,'" he said. "I was 23 and said, 'Sure I can open one, get it going and then go off and do my thing.' And that was 46 years ago."

In 1978, Whalen officially took over the little restaurant with little more than a credit card and confidence. It had 100 seats, one dining room and about 40 employees. He decided to call it the Machine Shed Restaurant, dedicated to the Iowa farmer.

But first, he had to finish law school. The next seven days were arguably the busiest of his life.

Whalen spent Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday in Chicago taking the bar exam. On Friday, he was back in Davenport, dressed in a red and white checked shirt, opening the doors to what would become a legacy restaurant.

"I didn't know what I was doing but I figured it out finally," he said with a laugh.

Whalen's prior restaurant experience included just one short stint as a salad boy, making the transition from consumer to owner a tricky one. That came to a head that winter, when the infamous snow storm of 1978 hit.

The interstate was shut down and that winter the area received a record 52.9 inches of snow and the average temperature reaching a record low at 14 degrees, according to the National Weather Service. The following January more records were broken when a snowstorm dropped 18.4 inches of snow in a three-day period.

"We survived the winter of '78 and '79 and by the spring of '79, I started to have it figured out," he said. "So I said, 'OK I have this figured out. I'll stick around a while.' And that was 46 years ago."

If all else failed, Whalen had his law degree to back him up. But that thought never crossed his mind, he said. What was supposed to be a way to help his dad in a pinch ended up being how Whalen found his calling.

"My law school buddies from Harvard thought I was nuts, and I probably seemed like I was, but it turned out really well," he said with a laugh. "I call the restaurant business a sickness. Anybody that likes the restaurant business and has



(Above) Long time Machine Shed of Davenport employees pose for a photo at the Davenport location. (Below) Chef Jeff Grunder and waitress Tracy Williamson plate food during lunch at the Machine Shed in the Davenport location. *Katelyn Metzger*





Johnny's Italian Steakhouse located in downtown Moline. *Katelyn Metzger*



been in it understands what I mean when I call it the sickness. It gets in your blood and you like it and you can hardly stay away. You just have to do it."

When the restaurant began, cooking from scratch and the farm-to-table movement were not highly talked about. People hardly talked about the farm at all, Whalen said, but his team did.

The whole concept behind the Machine Shed was it would be dedicated to the Iowa farmer, and honor their legacy with quality products and homecooked, made-from-scratch meals. It was a concept not all patrons understood right away.

"I had people ask me when we made real mashed potatoes what the bumps in the potatoes were because they'd only had

boxed mashed potatoes," he said. "We made our pies from scratch. Our soups from scratch."

One of the biggest changes the Machine Shed brought to the industry, Whaley said, was popularizing pork on the dinner menu. The Iowa chop, stuffed pork loin and America's cut cropped up on the menus.

"Those were things that nobody else in the country had on their dinner menus," he said. "We were actually instrumental in many ways by showing people you didn't have to cook pork well done."

Pork once was a common carrier of the parasite trichinella, which causes trichinosis. In 1947 the CDC reported nearly 500 cases. By 1986 that number dropped to fewer than 50, but the concern was still present.

With trichinella no longer common, the USDA has reduced the recommended safe cooking temperature for pork from 160 degrees to 145.

"The idea that you can still cook it with a pink center and it's still juicy was heresy," he said. "We stuck to it and did a lot to introduce pork and we're very proud of that."

Whalen now resides in Des Moines, but still goes to the Davenport Machine Shed when he's in town. Pouring coffee

and talking to people is how he got the business started, he said, and keeping that going is how his restaurants continue.

"It popped into my head one day that if you turn a guest into a friend, it will work in the end. Because friends come back," he said. "If someone got out the door without me talking to them, it bothered me."

That philosophy did Whalen well over the years and he eventually expanded the Davenport location to include 175 seats. With everything working in the Quad-Cities, Whalen decided to take the Machine Shed to Urbandale.

"This one we built almost 475 seats. I don't know why I thought that made sense, but I still remember standing at the front door going, 'I hope this works or I'm going to be broke,'" he said with a laugh. "It did."

Over time, Whalen started adding to his portfolio with Gramma's Kitchen & Checkered Flag in Walcott in 1984 and another in Washington, Illinois. The following year he purchased Thunder Bay Grille in Davenport, which now has three locations in three separate states.

In the years since, Whalen has named

his parent company the Heart of America Group, which he owns with his wife, Kim. Their portfolio now stretches across seven states and includes 25 restaurants and hotels, multi-family dwellings in Des Moines and other endeavors like the Hype Energy Bar in Des Moines and Tommy's Car Washes.

Whalen said he has taken the old business school adage of "find a need and fill it" and given it a twist.

"Our businesses are products we personally wanted to consume and we just hoped enough people agreed with us," he said.

The goal with the Machine Shed was to deliver the old fashioned Midwestern cooking he grew up with to his customers. When he eventually added Johnny's Italian Steakhouses in 2002, Whalen was looking for a way to bring a new atmosphere to town.

"I never saw what we were doing as taking a risk. I always figured if we did things right and executed the plan, enough people would go and stay there," he said. "We have just continued to do that over and over."

His philosophy on business has evolved over the years but stems from a line in

the Henry David Thoreau book, *Walden*, which he read at 18 in his freshman English class.

"Most men 'lead lives of quiet desperation'," he quoted. "I think that part of doing all these different things is my personal attempt never to be bored."

When he first started, the idea was to survive and and make payroll, he said. Now with nearly 4,000 employees and roots in Iowa, Whalen said he feels like he's just getting started on a dream he never knew he had.

"I am so happy I ended up staying in Iowa," he said. "I went from basically studying morning, noon and night at Harvard Law School, where pretty much what you do is read books and write and all of a sudden, overnight, I'm in the restaurant business."

All this from a Harvard graduate who just wanted to help out his father. The Machine Shed was supposed to be a temporary fix, he said. Now, it's just one piece of his legacy.

"If I could go talk to my 23-year-old self, I would be astonished," he said. "The Machine Shed is part of who I am."

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## Technology helps Revolute Machine advance manufacturing

**GRETCHEN TESKE**

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**A** small machine shop in Coal Valley might be fairly new to the manufacturing world but its reach already extends beyond Earth's surface.

Revolute Machine is a tool and die company with clients including SpaceX, Case IH, John Deere and Caterpillar. While the brand is new, co-owner Brad Goddard said his interest in manufacturing started in the late '90s when his dad opened a shop at home. Goddard and his sister and co-owner, Lisa McDowell, worked with their father through high school and college then continued on with their own careers after.

"That business ran its course and this equipment was just sitting here for a while," Goddard said. "Then Lisa started just doing some night and weekend work for other shops using the equipment that was out here."

McDowell started manufacturing parts herself in 2014 and slowly built up a clientele. She would make smaller parts for another machine shop who had big name clients such as Caterpillar and John Deere.

The robotic pallet system inserts a piece of uncut aluminum into the five axis mill to be cut at Revolute Machine.

*Katelyn Metzger*



Co-owner Lisa McDowell shows off machinery equipment at Revolute Machine. *Katelyn Metzger*

Goddard noticed how hard she was working and how much work was coming in. By 2020, he was considering a career change and decided to turn his attention to helping his sister to see if this business was something they could grow together.

"That took off and we probably did too good of a job," he said. "She started getting busy and I said, 'OK. Maybe I need to look into coming out here full-time.'"

During the height of the pandemic, prices were skyrocketing as companies struggled to keep up with demand. Parts made with 13 cents worth of metal, Goddard said, were going for \$6-7 a piece. The two found a way to make the same part, which he referred to as a weld lock, for \$2 and were able to deliver them on time.

"They end up using 10,000 of these a year or so and that's kind of what got us started," Goddard said. "Maybe it's just the way things were but they were getting really overcharged for a lot of stuff among other issues and we knew we could do this a lot better."

In 2023, Goddard joined his sister full-time and the pair have been "growing, adding equipment, adding capabilities, new customers and growing organically from there," he said.

With a long career in manufacturing already, Goddard was able to bring in new clients who grew to love the affordable prices at Revolute.

"It's really easy to build a new relationship with somebody if they already know you and trust you," he said.

The prices at Revolute were a selling point, and helped McDowell and Goddard grow the business. The projects the two are working on now are fairly simple, he said. With there being so much competition in the Quad-Cities manufacturing world, the pair are continuously looking for a new niche.

"We are trying to go up in complexity to do the stuff not everybody can do and do it a little bit differently so we're not fighting over this kind of work," he said, tapping the weld lock on the table.

To make the parts, a 3D model is constructed on the computer and programmed into the machine that will make it. Technology has a heavy influence at Revolute and is what sets them apart from other companies, Goddard said.

The back of the shop is lined with machines that cut and create parts, with a massive robotic pallet system dominating a corner of the room. Many machine shops rely on the tools that have worked for the last several decades. Revolute is focused on making technology work for them by investing in higher grade systems.

"In this manufacturing realm, it's almost paradoxical. It almost seems like technology really doesn't move along very fast," he said. "But technology as far as software like this or technology like this robot, it really lets you do things more efficiently."

With a few clicks of a button, Goddard can have a part programmed and the machines will be off and running ready to make it, he said. The software has become accessible and affordable in the last 10 years, he said, which helps with production.

Instead of having to employ a massive workforce, the robotic systems at Revolute can do work around the clock, and do so efficiently. The time it takes to make a



Brad Goddard works on a milling project at Revolute Machine. *Katelyn Metzger*

part depends on the complexity. If a part takes 30-40 minutes to make and the order requires 100, it could take 50 hours at a minimum. By using machines working around the clock, rather than eight hour shifts for people, Revolute can cut that down from a week of work to a couple days.

"What we're going to be able to do is get it set up, get it running and this robot's going to feed the parts into the machine 20 at a time. We will let it run overnight, we will let it run on the weekend. We can keep those parts running with very minimal human interaction basically 24/7 until the job's done," Goddard said. "Instead of the job taking a couple of weeks, we can get it done in a couple of days."

Time is important for both Revolute and their customers. The business grew from customers knowing they could get what they needed on-time, and holding themselves to that standard is what keeps it sustainable, Goddard said.

The parts Revolute makes range from simple to complex and have slowly carved



Revolute Machine-made weld locks sit in a box. *Katelyn Metzger*

out a niche for the company in the start-up aerospace world. They have made parts for drone engines, satellites and rockets.

McDowell said when she started this business by herself a decade ago, she had no intention of it growing this big, or working with her brother. The pair have opposite strengths that balance each other

out and have helped the business grow from a small workshop in Coal Valley to reaching outer space.

"I had the mindset I didn't want it to grow. It was just paying my bills," she said. "But he had that vision and I said, 'I'm along for the ride if that's what you want to do.'"

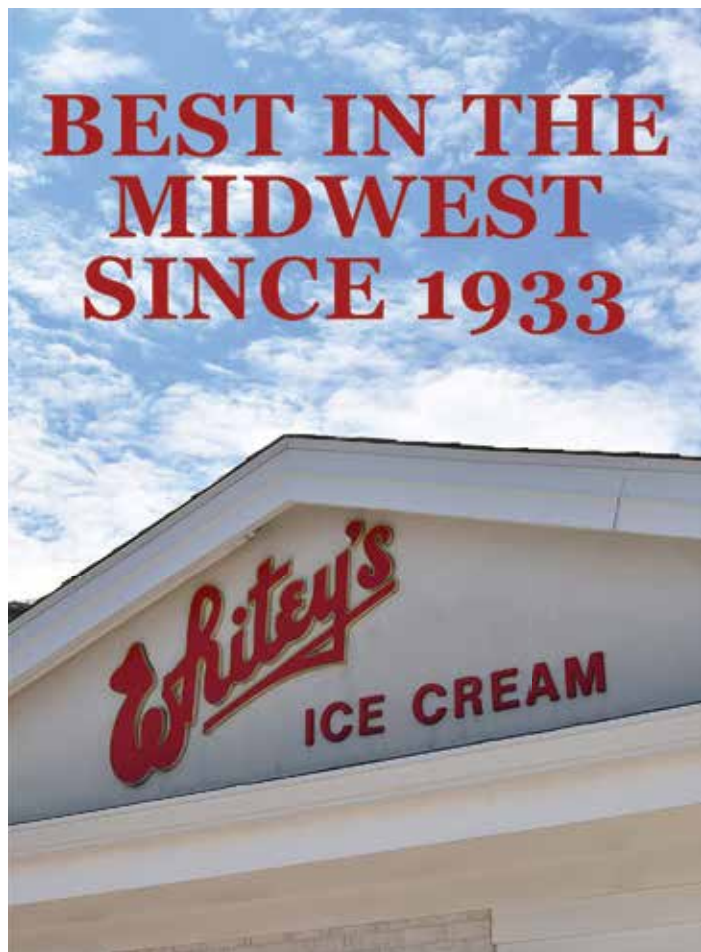
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# 2024 SEASON

## APRIL

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
					SB 6:30pm	SB 6:00pm
7 SB 1:00pm	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
WM	PEO 6:30pm	PEO 6:30pm	PEO 6:30pm	PEO 6:30pm	PEO 6:00pm	PEO 6:00pm
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
PEO 1:00pm	SB	SB	SB	SB	SB	SB
28	29	30				
SB		BEL				

## MAY

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
			1	2	3	4
			BEL	BEL	BEL	BEL
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
BEL		WIS 6:30pm	WIS 6:30pm	WIS 6:30pm	WIS 6:30pm	WIS 6:00pm
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
WIS 1:00pm		CR	CR	CR	CR	CR
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
CR		DAY 6:30pm	DAY 6:30pm	DAY 6:30pm	DAY 6:30pm	DAY 6:00pm
26	27	28	29	30	31	
DAY 6:30pm		SB 6:30pm	SB 6:30pm	SB 6:30pm	SB 6:30pm	

## JUNE

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
						1 SB 6:00pm
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
SB 1:00pm		WIS	WIS	WIS	WIS	WIS
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
WIS		BEL 6:30pm	BEL 6:30pm	BEL 6:30pm	BEL 6:30pm	BEL 6:00pm
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
BEL 1:00pm		GL	GL	GL	GL	GL
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
GL		PEO	PEO	PEO	PEO	PEO
30						
PEO						

## JULY

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
	1	2	3	4	5	6
	CR 6:30pm	CR 6:30pm	CR 6:00pm	CR	CR	CR
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
		PEO 6:30pm	PEO 6:30pm	PEO 6:30pm	PEO 6:30pm	PEO 6:00pm
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
PEO 1:00pm					SB	SB
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
SB		CR 6:30pm	CR 6:30pm	CR 6:30pm	CR 6:30pm	CR 6:00pm
28	29	30	31			
CR 1:00pm		PEO	PEO			

## AUGUST

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
				1	2	3
				PEO	PEO	PEO
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
PEO		WIS 6:30pm	WIS 6:30pm	WIS 6:30pm	WIS 6:30pm	WIS 6:00pm
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
WIS 1:00pm		BEL	BEL	BEL	BEL	BEL
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
BEL		LAN 6:30pm	LAN 6:30pm	LAN 6:30pm	LAN 6:30pm	LAN 6:00pm
25	26	27	28	29	30	31
LAN 1:00pm		WIS	WIS	WIS	WIS	WIS

## SEPTEMBER

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
	1	2	3	4	5	6
	WIS	BEL 6:30pm	BEL 6:30pm	BEL 6:30pm	BEL 6:30pm	BEL 6:00pm
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
BEL 1:00pm						

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