



INTERVIEW

SLY KRAUTKRAMER, Chief Operating Officer (COO), Swiderski Equipment, Inc.

By Joe Kertzman, managing editor, *Badger Common'Tater*

NAME: Sly Krautkramer

TITLE: Chief Operating Officer (COO)

COMPANY: Swiderski Equipment Inc.

LOCATION: Five Northcentral Wisconsin locations—Mosinee, Wausau, Thorp, Antigo and Waupaca

HOMETOWN: Marathon, Wisconsin

TIME IN PRESENT POSITION: Ten years as COO, but with the company for 42 years

PREVIOUS EMPLOYMENT: None

SCHOOLING: Northcentral Technical College, Wausau

FAMILY: Wife, Nancy, three married children and five grandkids

HOBBIES: Spending time with grandkids and family, camping, traveling and playing in the woods on his property

Above: Swiderski Equipment Inc. COO Sly Krautkramer stands in front of the Mosinee, Wisconsin, store.

Right: As the youngest son of the company founder, Alex Swiderski (left) and his wife, Dianne, continue as sole proprietors of the business and take great pride in treating their employees well.

From humble beginnings training and selling workhorses to farmers in the area until today, Swiderski Equipment Inc. has been a fixture in the Central Wisconsin agricultural community.

In 1925, the Swiderski family opened a horse dealing business on their Mosinee homestead, and by the late 1930's, Swiderski Implement was proudly selling New Holland and Minneapolis Moline tractors and implements.

The 1940's saw expansion into agricultural equipment, and by the 1950's and '60s, several of the Swiderski sons were involved in the family business. They expanded to two dealership locations, one in Mosinee and one in Bonduel.

In 1959, the youngest son, Alex, joined the family business, and in 1964, became sole proprietor at the Mosinee location.

"The Swiderski family has always been made up of entrepreneurs and innovators," says company COO Sly Krautkramer. "Through the years, the family adapted to changes and advancements in the equipment industry."

"Alex and his wife, Dianne, are still sole proprietors of the business and take great pride in caring for their

employees," Krautkramer states.

Swiderski Equipment expanded in the late '80s with the acquisition





Above: A tracked New Holland Genesis T8 tractor from Swiderski Equipment is employed during potato harvest at Jesse James Teal Farms, owned by Jesse Teal, in Antigo, Wisconsin.

Right: The Swiderski team, from left to right, Rich Meyer, Kevin Belott and Scott Doyle, was present and accounted for at the WPVGA Industry Show in Stevens Point, Wisconsin



of Marathon Implement, just north of Wausau, and saw significant expansion in the '90s with the addition of locations in Thorp (1992), Antigo (1995) and Waupaca (1997).

“Alex worked tirelessly to build the business up through the years,” Krautkramer stresses, “and our success today is based on many of his core principals—his aggressive yet fair approach to business and his willingness to take a risk here and there.”

Does Swiderski Equipment Inc. still have a family business feel? Alex and all the managers take a lot of pride in putting employees first. Knowing every employee’s name and making them feel they are important members of the team, not just numbers in our business, is extremely important to us.

We have a great team of people, several with 35-plus years of service to our business, which we feel speaks volumes about the opportunities and leadership of the company.

We work hard to maintain the same company culture that Alex created over the years, one that empowers our people to make decisions and take care of their customers and the business.

What is your own personal history in the agriculture industry, and at Swiderski Equipment? I grew up on my family’s dairy farm outside of Marathon, so I have been in agriculture my whole life.

I have been with SEI (Swiderski Equipment Inc.) for over 40 years, starting in parts, then sales at what was then known as Marathon Implement Co., which was acquired by Swiderski Equipment, in 1987, and

became our Wausau store.

I am still also currently manager of the Wausau store and previously had been store manager of the Mosinee location.

As the company COO, tell me how the five Swiderski locations and employees work together to accomplish quality sales and service. Our stores have a unique relationship. We are one

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Above: Swiderski Equipment co-sponsors a plot where equipment, like the New Holland machinery shown at harvest, is put to the test through various technology and field trials.

Right: Company COO Sly Krautkramer (right) and a group of Swiderski Equipment employees learn about New Holland Forage Harvesters during a training session.



organization, and our sales staff can sell equipment from any location.

We have full parts and service departments and staff at each location to ensure we can efficiently serve our customers' needs. Each can also help the other stores out when needed.

Our Precision Farming Division supports all stores, along with our trucking division that works with the

five locations.

But there is a healthy level of competition between the stores, too. It is like a family; there is a bit of competitiveness between them all.

What are your main manufacturing lines? Our main lines are New Holland; AGCO, which includes Massey Ferguson tractors, White planters, Gleaner combines, Sunflower tillage and Hesston hay

tools; Kuhn; Great Plains; Bobcat; Doosan; Kioti and a host of short lines. Those are Meyer, H&S, Brillion, Woods and others.

We carry everything from tractors and tillage to planters, self-propelled choppers, combines and sprayers. We also carry a full line of light and heavy construction equipment.

The diversity and variety of brands and lines allows us to find almost any piece of equipment a customer is looking for.

What equipment does Swiderski carry that fills the needs of potato and vegetable growers? Potato and vegetable growers are incredibly important to our business and we highly value those customers and being able to serve their needs.

We carry all sizes of tractors, from compact and utility to mid-range, high-horsepower and four-wheel drive (4WD).

White Planters have progressed through the years and offer the ability to plant over 14 different crops with 99 percent accuracy, so that has opened opportunities for vegetable and specialty crop growers.



Alex Swiderski (with back to camera) shares some stories and tips with Team Swiderski members.

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On display at the Swiderski Equipment booth during the 2017 WPS Farm Show in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, was a New Holland T7.290 tractor (which one pair of little siblings particularly liked) and a historic company timeline posterboard, below.

We also offer a full precision farming division to service the technology side of things. Our precision farming team sells, installs and services Trimble, Precision Planting, Greentronics, DigiFarm, 360 Yield Center and Farmer's Edge.

Our parts and service teams can get parts and provide service for all brands, regardless if we sell them or not. We truly are a full-service stop for equipment and technology needs, as well as parts and service.

How far does the Swiderski customer base stretch? Our primary customer base is in Wisconsin, and we take a lot of pride in working with growers and farms of all sizes, from the small hobby farmer up to the large-acreage operator.

Swiderski Equipment Inc. ~ Then & Now

1925
There were 6,454,000 Farms in the US with farmers making up 27% of the labor force.

The Swiderski family opens a horse dealing business on their Mosinee homestead, training and selling work horses to area farmers.

1930-1940s
The great depression of the early '30s pushes farm prices to an all-time low by 1932.

The agriculture industry adjusts and finds new ways to be more efficient. Rubber tires became popular in the mid-30s and the Swiderski Family met the needs of local customers by upgrading tractors with steel wheels and replacing them with new rubber tires.

By the late '30s Swiderski Implement opened a location in downtown Mosinee on the corner of Hwy. 153 & Hwy. B, where the current S & S Cafe is located.

Wartime recovery provided a boost to equipment technology in the 1940s. 2 and 4 row corn planters were a popular purchase for local farmers.

By 1940, there were 6,102,000 farms in the U.S. and each farmer was supplying 10.7 people with food per farmer.

Swiderski Implement expanded to selling Kaiser-Frazer cars for a few years, in addition to agriculture equipment. In 1948 the first building at 820 Old Bus St. N. in Mosinee was built and the business moved to the edge of town.

1950s-1960s
The '50s were a challenging time for agriculture as recession hit late in the decade. Industry turned a corner in the '60s, with a renewed emphasis on rural development from the federal government.

By 1954, the number of tractors on farms exceeded the number of horses and mules across the U.S. two of the Swiderski sons were now involved in the family business and they had expanded to 2 dealership locations, one in Mosinee and one in Bronduel.

The 2nd oldest son Stan, owned a twine factory in Cuba and Swiderski Implement was one of the first major distributors for Stan's Twine.

In 1959, the youngest son Alex joined the family business and became sole proprietor at the Mosinee location in 1964.

Swiderski Implement continued to carry New Holland and Minneapolis Mobile and expanded to offer New Idea, Oliver and Allis Chalmers.

The Swiderski name was also well-known in the cattle business during these years, as Alex and his older brother Orbiting Joe bought and sold quality cattle throughout the area.

1970s-1980s
No-till agriculture practices became popular in the '70s and a renewed focus on agriculture boosted the number of students taking Agriculture classes in the U.S. to 853,000 students by 1980.

Farmers continued to improve efficiencies and increase production, and by 1980 each farmer in the U.S. was feeding approx. 76 people per farmer.

Swiderski Implement added on to the Mosinee location in 1970 and slowly moved away from the cattle business to focus on the implement dealership.

Swiderski Equipment was able to expand in the late '80s, with the acquisition of Marathon Implement, just north of Waupun, in 1987.

The Farm Financial Crisis hit in the '90s and the Midwest experienced one of the worst droughts in history in 1988 & 1989.

1990s-2000s
Information technology and precision techniques gained popularity in the '90s and combined with improved biotechnology to boost production for farmers. Farmers were now supporting 100 people per farmer, with an increasing population.

Swiderski Equipment saw significant expansion in the mid-'90s with the addition of locations in Thorp (1992), Amigo (1995) and Waupaca (1997). The dealership also changed its name from Wheelin' and Dealer Al Swiderski Implement to Swiderski Equipment Inc.

The business also broke into the construction market, with the addition of New Holland Construction Equipment in early 2000.

Today
Swiderski Equipment Inc. continues to serve customers from their 5 Central WI locations. Main product lines include New Holland, Massey Ferguson (MGCO), Bobcat, Kioti, and Doosan construction equipment.

With our ever-increasing population, the demand for farmers to be more efficient is immense. It's estimated that 1 U.S. farmer today produces enough food for 155 people.

Highly trained precision farming specialists at Swiderski Equipment bring the latest technology to customers, allowing them to increase production and profits, while saving time and money.

Highly skilled service technicians and parts specialists keep equipment running where it needs to be, in the field or on the job.

While technology flourishes and equipment grows larger, our focus continues to be providing the best service possible for our customers by meeting their needs and exceeding their expectations.

From the large acreage operator to small farmers, contractors, landowners, or small businesses, Swiderski Equipment Inc. is Your partner on the job!

SWIDERSKI EQUIPMENT INC.
Mosinee Waupun Thorp Amigo Waupaca
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Our sales team is truly a team of consultants who want to understand all aspects of our customers' businesses so we can help find the right solutions for their individual needs.

The internet has opened opportunities for us to sell equipment across the country and even occasionally internationally. Owning our own trucking company, Swiderski Transport, also makes it easier for us to schedule deliveries and pick-ups with customers, whether they are in Wisconsin or across the country.

What services does Swiderski Equipment provide to potato and vegetable growers in the area? Our service departments work on all brands of equipment, regardless if we sold it or not. Each store has a fleet of service trucks so we can easily send techs out to the field for on-site service.

We also can work with the customer to arrange trucking for those larger jobs that need to be brought in for work.

We offer 24/7 support from planting through harvest so we can help minimize downtime for our customers.

Why is service after the sale important? Service after the sale

is where we can differentiate ourselves from other dealers. We provide 24/7 service, parts and precision farming support for customers from April through November.

We understand the demands our customers face and know their timelines can be short, so when something does go wrong, we want to see them back up and going as quickly as possible.

We want to be consultants to

Right: Swiderski Equipment was recognized by New Holland as one of the top dealers in the country, in 2018, with company COO Sly Krautkramer (center) accepting the award.

Left: At its own plot where Swiderski Equipment often gives tours and does field and technology trials, a Massey Ferguson 8730 tractor pulls a White Planter equipped with precision planting capabilities.


our customers and help them find solutions that improve their operations' profitability.

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Do you or some of your sales and service guys get out in the field and get your/their hands dirty? We certainly are not afraid to get out there and get our hands dirty; that's an everyday occurrence in some areas of our business! Our service techs and precision farming team are routinely in the field with customers.

We have several sales team members who gladly jump in a tractor on the weekends or after hours to help a customer. We have a lot of employees who grew up on farms and still enjoy the opportunity to stay active in the industry or help when they can.

We have co-sponsored our own field plot the past three years where we put our equipment to the test through various technology and field trials. It has been a great learning experience for customers and employees alike to be involved from



The company leadership team includes, from left to right, Rick Baeseman, Sly Krautkramer, Dianne and Alex Swiderski, Tom Nitschke, Gary Lemmer and Mike Witzeling.

planting through harvest.

What does Swiderski provide that other implement and equipment dealers in the area do not? We feel we offer a tremendous opportunity for customers with the variety of brands we carry as well as the amount of used inventory our stores carry.

Few dealers carry the amount of inventory that Swiderski Equipment does, and that translates into opportunity and more options for our customers.

We also have some of the most talented employees in the industry. From our parts and service staff to our precision farming team members and our sales staff, you won't find more knowledgeable, helpful people in the business anywhere!

Are there any exciting new products or expansions coming? Our precision division has seen some great growth and is projected to continue growing. The demands of the growers for precision solutions is out there, so we have invested in responding to their high-level needs with additional staff.

Really, all other segments of our business have seen growth and expect to continue growing. Because of our great service, growers and producers are turning more to SEI to become a partner.

What do you appreciate about the potato and vegetable growing industry in Wisconsin? I see this industry as a group of great professionals that frankly are fun to work with! They value a good partnership with each other and dealers alike.

They are good business-minded and family-orientated people.



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Swiderski Equipment is an Associate Division member of the Wisconsin Potato & Vegetable Growers Association (WPVGA). Why is it important to be involved? We have been an Associate Division member for years and the association gives us a chance to connect with growers and better understand industry demands, changes and opportunities.

We appreciate the work the association does to advance and keep the industry thriving.

Our success depends on the success of our customers, so it is important that we do what we can to help support the industry as well.

We have participated in many events like the winter Industry Show and appreciate the opportunity every year to reconnect with customers and showcase new solutions and opportunities from our end.

How can you help the growers farm more efficiently? We are a solutions-based company. We want

“We offer 24/7 support from planting through harvest so we can help minimize downtime for our customers.”

– Sly Krautkramer

to offer solutions that improve each operation to be as efficient and profitable as possible.

We only have 24 hours in a day, and we know our customers must utilize those hours as efficiently as possible.

What do you want them to know about Swiderski Equipment?

Swiderski Equipment Inc. is the leading ag equipment dealer in Northcentral Wisconsin. We are strong, being in business for over half a century. Most of our staff has been with us for decades and is rich with knowledge and understanding.

We pride ourselves in keeping up with trends and products/services that help make the grower/producer

more profitable.

What do you hope for the future of Swiderski Equipment? My goal is to continue as the leading ag equipment dealer in Northcentral Wisconsin with staff to provide solutions for our professional customers to be the most profitable they can be in whatever business they are in.

Is there anything I have missed, Sly, that you'd like to add? We feel blessed as a business to be working with the agricultural community. It is the most important industry in our area. We thank you and all the growers and producers for your hard work and for feeding the world. **BCT**

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