



INTERVIEW

MIKE WEIS,

President/CEO, Roberts Irrigation

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

New to his role at the helm of Roberts Irrigation,

President and Chief Executive Officer Mike Weis says he is not the face of the organization, but instead he's taking a team approach with the goal of building and empowering many contributing members.

NAME: Mike Weis

Title: President/CEO

Company: Roberts Irrigation

Location: Plover, WI

Hometown: Stratford, WI

Years in Present Position: Two months

Previous Employment: Manufacturing environment over the past 35 years in a variety of general management, operational, and executive positions in the Wausau area

Schooling: University of Wisconsin-Stout, with a Bachelor of Science in engineering

Activities/Organizations: Member of the Wisconsin Potato & Vegetable Growers Association

Family: Mike has been married to his wife, Lyn, for 33 years and they have a son, Zach, and two daughters, Chelsea and Cassie, the latter of whom, along with her husband, Brady, is expecting Mike and Lyn's first grandchild

Hobbies: Avid hunter who likes fishing and still plays softball. "I play on a 55-and-older senior softball traveling team out of the Minneapolis/St. Paul area," Mike says. "At the end of March, we played in Virginia Beach."

An employee-owned ESOP (Employee Stock Ownership Plan) company, Roberts Irrigation has been a leader in Wisconsin agricultural irrigation since 1957. For nearly 70 years, the Roberts family has provided innovative and reliable solutions to growers in Central Wisconsin and beyond.

A certified Reinke dealer, Roberts Irrigation has been at the forefront of advancing water application methods and irrigation technology, historically transitioning from heavy steel pipes to lightweight aluminum pipe and wheel line systems, and finally to today's advanced center-pivot systems.

ROBERTS IRRIGATION

At Mike's request, Roberts Irrigation Sales and Marketing Manager Margaret Klismith sat in on the interview, with Mike stressing that she is an incredibly strong team member excelling in a role often

Above: At the request of new Roberts Irrigation President and CEO Mike Weis, the company's sales and marketing manager, Margaret Klismith, sat in on the interview. Mike stressed that Margaret is an incredibly strong team member excelling in a role often dominated by men in the agriculture industry.



dominated by men in the agriculture industry.

Mike, what is your own background, and does it include agriculture? The only background I have in agriculture is from a long time ago, having grown up on my family's turkey farm, but I think that type of environment formed not only my roots, but also my work ethic.

My dad had 13 brothers and sisters, many of them in farming, and my grandfather was a farmer. My wife grew up on a dairy farm, but my overall experience is not so much being in agriculture as taking from my limited farming experiences a desire to learn, listen, and work hard.

I'm already getting along well with Roberts Irrigation customers because they're people who I can relate to, and I have some understanding of what they go through daily on the farm. I can have meaningful conversations with them.

Left: The beautiful photo of a Reinke irrigation system is a nice illustration of the gun, booster pump, and sprinklers on top.

Right: A Roberts Irrigation service technician captures a serial number and other information so that the farmer can apply for a warranty on the pivot system. Roberts Irrigation fills out warranty cards and sends them in for customers.

Mike, how did you end up at the helm of Roberts Irrigation, and why is it a good fit for you? I've always wanted to lead an organization and believe that I have the skills necessary to do that. When this opportunity came up, it just felt right.

I had only worked for large manufacturing companies, the last one having 1,000 employees, so the idea of working with a smaller company appealed to me. I like to lead, mentor, and coach from a business perspective, with a goal toward operational excellence.

What's intriguing about Roberts are the products and services we offer, as well as this idea of moving water, both in getting rid of water and bringing water in. I see the benefits of both draining excess water off fields and construction job sites and bringing water in through irrigation in a controlled environment.

I was also intrigued with the business being 100 percent employee owned. It seems like if there's ownership by a team, it should be cause for

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improvements in safety and quality of products and services, two things that are close to my heart.

Roberts has been around for long time. Next year we'll be celebrating our 70th year in business. The types of relationships and partnerships that have occurred in a business like this over that period are awesome. I enjoy building and retaining those types of relationships.

Margaret, how many locations does Roberts Irrigation have, where, and with how many employees?

Roberts Irrigation has two locations in Plover and Bloomer, Wisconsin, and presently a total of 50 employees. Plus, we have a few open positions posted online to bring in more help for the busy season.

I would consider Plover to be the main office and Bloomer more of a satellite location, but it also has a fully equipped shop and service department, and a lineup of parts available for customers.

I want to mention our acquisition, in 2024, when we purchased land in the Eau Claire area where we're looking to expand and be centrally located for our southwestern and northwestern customers nearer the Wisconsin/ Minnesota border.

Mike: We're still forming our strategy for the Eau Claire location and how to best develop it to help grow the Roberts Irrigation business.

Margaret, can you give me a brief history or overview of the company?

The company was created by the Roberts family, with Hal being the original founder, and his son, Paul, eventually taking over and running the business.

The business was started in the Black River Falls area, with Hal and his wife transitioning it to the Plover location when farmers began to grow potatoes and vegetables under irrigation.



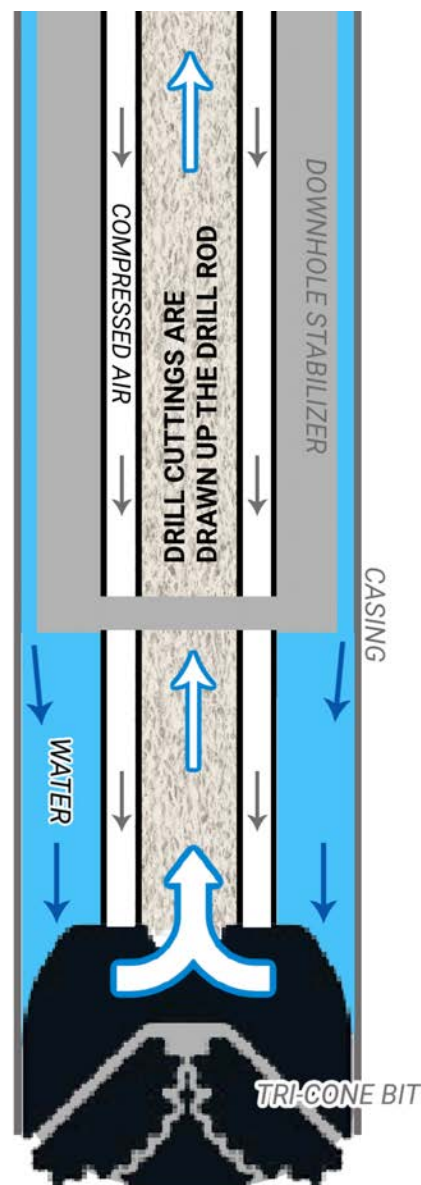
Above: In this early Roberts Irrigation photo from when Hal Roberts ran the operation, a tractor is used to run a pump and pull irrigation water from a local source.

Right: The technical drawing illustrates the drilling technique employed by Roberts Irrigation using forced air, which is cleaner for the sites.

In preparing for our 70th anniversary next year, I asked Paul about some fun things we've done over the years and who some of our first customers were. We have one customer who's been with us since the beginning. He's 91 years old and still farming today.

In researching a little about the history of Roberts Irrigation, we began to ask ourselves questions like, "Who bought the 1,000th pivot?" and "On what farm was the first well drilled?" And we'll start to compile and incorporate some of those stories into our 70th anniversary celebration next year.

Mike: When we talk about what brought me here, the relationship piece was certainly front and center. The other day, the 91-year-old gentleman who Margaret mentioned visited us here, and I had a 45-minute conversation with him covering the last 60 years that he's been a customer.



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setup on the front side, and parts and service on the backside.

There's no debate of who owns each job and answers for it. We're a vertically integrated one-stop shop.

Margaret, what exactly is environmentally safe wastewater distribution, and how can Roberts Irrigation help growers with that?

That's something we're in the infancy stages of. We're starting to research how our customers can use wastewater as a nutrient for their crops.

Mike: We have dewatering solutions for growers to utilize drainage ditches, and many of the same customers who we support on the potato side, we also serve on the construction side. It's a different piece, and I happen to have more experience on the construction side.

If someone is putting up a brand-new building—it's currently under construction, and the water table is high or the area is experiencing a lot of rain, that can certainly bring the process to a halt. Timing is everything, it means money, and the customer needs to get the structure up.

We have solutions to remove water and drop that water table down, so construction is one example of water distribution.

So, then, Margaret, what percentage of the Roberts Irrigation business is in agriculture? It's high—80 percent of our customers are connected to agriculture, with the other 20 percent made up of such industries as construction firms, universities, school districts, municipalities and sanitation districts.

We've put up center pivots for conservancies planting prairie grass, but the business model will always skew toward the agriculture side and water delivery.

Mike: Like any good business model, we look to diversify and discover products and services that will lead us into other industries. The big picture is agriculture, but that also happens to be cyclical and seasonal. By diversifying, we won't be as dependent on the seasons.

We don't want to lay off employees during the slow season, but to instead keep team members fully engaged and employed.

Our current workforce is difficult

Left: The Roberts Irrigation booth is all set up and ready for visitors at the Grower Education Conference & Industry Show in Stevens Point, Wisconsin.

Right: Jesse Gruba of Roberts Irrigation drills a well at the Food + Farm Exploration Center in Plover, Wisconsin.

to navigate. It's harder to find people and retain them than ever before, so we turn to technology, automation and innovation to adapt and grow the business.

Margaret, do potato and vegetable growers typically employ drip irrigation? Our potato growers, especially in the Central Sands region and further north, rely mainly on center pivots, but when you go south toward Madison, particularly in industries such as nursery operations, greenhouses, or even brussels sprouts growers, they practice drip irrigation.

The soil components in the southern part of the state are different from the sands of Central Wisconsin or the soils further north, and they will apply drip irrigation for the health of their products and to keep disease at bay when working at the root level on down, rather than spraying from overhead.



Margaret, does Roberts Irrigation have a large team of installers and maintenance personnel, and how do they work with growers?

We have several service teams, including electricians, our pump crew, diesel technicians who can work on pumps and motors, well drillers, plumbers, welders, HDPE (high-

density polyethylene) fusion techs, fabricators who can create detailed pieces for any project, builders who erect systems, and maintenance staff.

As a turnkey operation, we have a service individual or expert in the field at every level who can bring product across the finish line.

Above: The Reinke irrigator display is courtesy of Roberts Irrigation at the Food + Farm Exploration Center in Plover.

Mike: We're also concentrating our efforts more toward preventive equipment maintenance best practices, with maintenance

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schedules that are data driven and analytic.

Many industries are transitioning to a more analytical approach, using data to drive decision making. It is an exciting thing I can bring to irrigation.

Margaret, are the Roberts Irrigation crews in the field after installation for service and instruction? Sure, that makes up the customer-facing component, and our service crews do a wonderful job. They're really the ones who ensure customer

satisfaction after the initial sale and installation of a pivot system.

Service calls include anything from pivot crashes in heavy windstorms to assistance with new systems and general maintenance.

Margaret, are there any recent improvements to the Reinke center pivot systems? Yes, Reinke just debuted a new center pivot with a couple components that have changed structurally for better support from the brackets.

The sprinkler output pattern is more uniform to provide customers with complete coverage over fields, and the pressure can be adjusted to not damage crops. The tires also have less impact on the soil, so the crop quality and yield improve.

Margaret, does it seem like most growers want remote sensing and to be able to turn on and off or change irrigation via their phones?

Yes, most of our customers have some sort of telemetry capabilities. Even without the FieldWise portal for field monitoring or a Nano TGB monitor, the basic center pivot packages include a framework for communication through smart phones and laptop devices.

Mike: I think growers today are working smarter and making a lot more decisions around data than ever before. I think it's cool that



Above: Welding pipes is part of the job for Roberts Irrigation system fabricators.

Left: The photo shows the typical plumbing and HDPE (high-density polyethylene) pipe work that Roberts Irrigation performs for area potato and vegetable growers.

they're able to make informed investment decisions and use data to drive return on investment.

When we meet with customers, most of them are excited about data that shows them when they have the appropriate amount of moisture content on their fields.

Margaret, what remote sensing software do you offer, and what capabilities does it have? We work with a handful of vendors to offer different solutions depending on what the grower or customer is looking for, including FieldWise telemetry and CropX soil sensors and moisture probes.

Reinke technology allows customers to not only turn center pivots on and off remotely but also provides information and suggestions about how much precipitation to apply in inches or quarter inches.

Messages are sent to customers' cellular phones and devices telling them when a pivot has a fault or error and how to correct it. We're working with vendors who specialize in giving customers such information as frost alerts or other weather data to help them make informed irrigation decisions.

Margaret, what are the advantages of telemetry and/or remote sensing?

There are a lot of advantages. Our customers work long days and many hours, so to be able to bring a pivot system error to their attention or information telling them to irrigate a certain area of the field or perform proactive crop protection practices puts them at ease.

They don't have to run out to the pivot in the middle of the night to make sure the irrigators are running. They can see that information on their phones at their bedside. It's something our customers want. They want to have security. "I can see it all here; the pivot system is running as it should."

Some of the larger growers have



An electrical control panel is set up and ready for use at a local farm site.

agronomists on site, but the smaller customers who don't have that luxury become reliant on telemetry and other data options.

Margaret, what types of well drilling or maintenance does Roberts Irrigation provide?

One of the things that Roberts still does that's different from our competitors is the way wells are drilled. Through our system, there's no need to lay out water supply lines, no excavation, and better yielding wells.

The wells are straight. Oftentimes, when drilling wells through several layers of soil, you'll hit rocks and boulders. While the drill rigging and tooling of other well drillers will move to the side when hitting rock, our drills continue right through it for a straight, clean well site.


We don't do mud drilling, and we use forced air, which is cleaner for the sites. Our reverse rotary drill rigs are sought-after by the industry.

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Mike, how important is building relationships in this business, and why? This is certainly a relationship-building business, and I would take it a step further and say it's more a partnership-driven business.

Even though growers in the area compete against each other, they also have a strong desire to come to the aid of a neighbor in need. Just like when my grandfather and parents were farming, growers still get together to help a neighbor bale hay, or they share equipment during planting or harvest.

That's a partnership, and Roberts Irrigation strives to be a partner to our customers.

Margaret, is there a lot of brand loyalty, and if so, why Reinke?

Roberts Irrigation was voted the number two Reinke dealer in our region last year. We're a Diamond Dealer and enjoy a longstanding relationship that was initially based on a handshake deal between Hal Roberts and the founder of Reinke.

Similarly, we want to partner and do business with area potato and vegetable growers and other

customers. As the only Reinke dealer in Wisconsin, the brand is our bread and butter, and we service the entire state of Wisconsin, northern Michigan, eastern Minnesota, and south to the Illinois border.

As far as brand loyalty is concerned, growers generally look at what works in their types of fields and soils. We have some customers who are loyal to Reinke, but the main thing to keep in mind is that we service other pivots and our crew is versed in multiple brands and setups.

Margaret, are there other brands, parts or services that Roberts Irrigation offers that aren't available elsewhere? In addition to Reinke, CropX and FieldWise, we offer Flowserve industrial pumps manufactured in Nebraska. They build their own pump dies and castings and have been in business for 150 years.

Mike, what are your goals as the new president? My goals center around operational excellence. I'm wearing the team out already in the first few weeks preaching safety and environmental practices.

Above Left: Reinke offers advanced, precision control at users' fingertips for operation of irrigation systems.

Above Right: Eric Streekstra of Roberts Irrigation checks the electrical current of a control panel.

We're going to be good stewards of the environment but we're also going to be safe in a lot of different situations, on the road, during installations and maintenance, and working around electricity.

So, safety is number one, and number two, we're going to work hard on quality. We're going to make mistakes, but we need to make sure we're providing a quality product and service, and that goes a long way towards building relationships and partnerships.

We're going to work on schedule attainment, doing what we say and saying what we do, making sure we're performing at the highest level, and establishing internal team expectations and accountability.

We have a lot of experience here —ag experience and industry experience—and we have the right team in place. The key is getting them

to work together seamlessly, and that's my job. It's a pretty big agenda.

Margaret, is there anything I've missed that you'd like to add? Our brands, parts and services are not available elsewhere. Last year, we focused on our website and online availability of parts and components. We launched a new website with an online store in April 2025, and by the end of the year, had shipped products to 22 states.

We can provide the parts and

components to customers across the United States.

Mike: As for the online parts, we offer thousands of parts, 5,000 different skews, and that's unique. To Margaret's credit, with her industry experience in this area, we are different from other organizations. She drove the online parts program, and I'm interested to see how far that goes for us.

The team has some great ideas, and I'm pursuing them along with

the whole idea of how we can run Roberts as a business that steps outside of the traditional irrigation company boundaries.

I'm very excited about what's yet to come. I'm so new to the position that I'm still drinking the Kool-Aid, so to speak. The opportunities that we have are so tremendous, and that excites me very much. My job is to be a cheerleader for our team and present them with the best opportunities for success. **BCT**



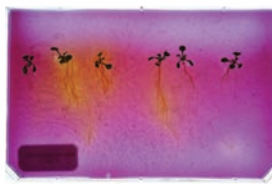
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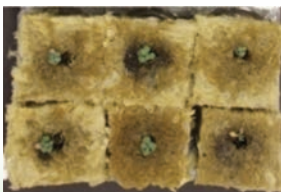
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