

## **How Marvin Windows & Doors recruits and maintains a strong workforce in a small town**

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On Wednesday, Susan Marvin, former president of Marvin Windows and Doors and now vice chair, addressed a room of roughly 300 people working in or affiliated with Minnesota's manufacturing industry as the keynote speaker of the 2016 Minnesota Manufacturer's Summit.

Warroad, Minnesota. Population: 1,800. Located just south of the Canadian border, it is but a blemish on a map. In the world of business, though, it is home to one of the largest window and door manufacturers in the world, Marvin Windows & Doors.

And that's exactly where the company likes it, said Susan Marvin, former president of Marvin Windows and Doors and now vice chair, who believes upholding the company's humble beginnings strengthened its workforce and made it easier to recruit employees to the small town.

And while some Greater Minnesota companies have traded in their rural main offices for urban base camps, a plausible strategy to attract millennials, family-owned Marvin has no intention of following, Marvin said as she addressed roughly 300 people affiliated with Minnesota's manufacturing industry as the keynote speaker of the 2016 Minnesota Manufacturer's Summit in Bloomington on Wednesday, an event presented by the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce.

Of Marvin's 5,000 total employees, 2,000 work in Warroad, and keeping the headquarters in the area has forced the company to be more innovative, "and some of those innovations became competitive strengths," she said.

"These people we work with, they're our friends, our neighbors and our classmates," Marvin said. "If we pulled out — and they built the company — that just wouldn't be right because we feel that they had a great deal to do with the success that we have today. It's critically important that we continue to support the community."

During the Great Recession, Marvin Windows and Doors proved it was dedicated to supporting the Warroad community by refusing to lay off employees. Just as it did during the Great Depression, the company made sacrifices to maintain its employee base.

"Keeping people together on the payroll and with medical benefits was a priority, and as long as we could do it, we were going to do it," Marvin said.

Marvin said this show of loyalty sealed a bond between ownership and employees that resonated with the community. Moreover, Marvin said the company has purposefully tried to recruit employees who enjoy a small town atmosphere and prefer to live in a rural setting rather than try to lure prospects from the city.

But Marvin Window's recruiting strategy goes beyond lifestyle to changing the perception of the manufacturing industry, Marvin said, a strategy vital for all companies looking to increase their workforces.

"It's truly education and educating people about all the exciting careers that you can have in manufacturing," she said. "The ideal way is to take people through your facility and show them the opportunities. Show them what the IT department looks like and our architectural department and our mechanics and the programmers and the CAD (Computer-Aided Design) people. When they can see all those very intelligent people applying their skills in what's a traditional, old-fashioned manufacturing company, I think they find that really exciting, but you can only get so many people through your factory."

Marvin said one tactic is having employees who are millennials share their job experience in the manufacturing industry with their peers. Other companies has made this tactic a part of an employee's job description.

"When you see a young person, whether they are in high school or college, talking about their enthusiasm for their career in manufacturing, the light bulbs go on and it's much more believable than if you see me out there," she said.

While most of Marvin's 45-minute speech involved the company's past, she also touched on future. She said the company is using more robotics in factories to become more efficient, using virtual reality to demonstrate products and using big data to better understand client trends and patterns. "We've been doing rapid prototyping for over 20 years, a lot of our new products are developed with the use of rapid prototyping. In other words, we use tools and parts in our rapid prototyping machine to test designs and do it very quickly. I just see that growing and growing." Marvin also mentioned 3D printing as a tool for creating designs.