

THE 2018 M. CONLEY
ENTREPRENEUR-OF-THE-YEAR AWARD WINNER

TOWER INDUSTRIES, INC.

Massillon, Ohio



When Todd Werstler’s father was in his 50s, health problems forced him to sell his Ace Hardware store and take a straight commission job selling cultured marble. During five years as the company’s only salesman, he quintupled sales earning so much money his boss fired him. Some reward. 30 years later, the memory still lingers for son, Todd.



Photography by Shawn Wood, Studio 7 Photography

Todd Werstler has a long memory. When he wanted to attend Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, the private school tuition was beyond the family’s means until the University’s Financial Aid office found a way to make it affordable. Todd Werstler never forgot.

After graduation, his job as a District Manager for Carolina Freight earned him enough money to fund a year traveling the world, pondering his future. Back in Washington D.C. he wrote his father a letter telling him he was coming home to Stark County to start a cultured marble business competing with his father’s former employer.

Father Bob Werstler had a better idea. He knew DuPont’s Corian patent had expired and felt that Solid Surface material was even better than cultured marble for counter tops and similar building products. Soon Todd was holed up in a small apartment developing a 100-page business plan. Three months later the Stark Development Board looked it over, liked his emphasis on job creation and helped him arrange low interest loans. To get the business off the ground Bob and Joyce Werstler mortgaged the family home, their only real asset. They were going all-in on their son.

Bob’s builder contacts supplied many of the original sales. More borrowed money secured a \$3,000 former bread truck for deliveries. The board of directors were six of Todd’s Wake Forest friends.

One day in 2004 a builder in Michigan called wondering if Tower Industries could produce 150 shower stalls for an Eastern Michigan University dormitory. The job had to be done in just six weeks. Todd’s response: “Absolutely!”. Then he figured out a way to do it.

Around the same time, Todd was talking to a close friend about the barriers keeping his small business small. The friend, a highly successful builder, suggested he read the book “Good to Great.” There he discovered the “Hedgehog Concept,” “*The fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows One Big Thing.*” Find something you do well and become the best.

Tower Industries’ One Big Thing became Solid Surface institutional shower stalls produced in quantity. Eastern Michigan University was just the beginning. Every time a sale was made to another college, Todd bought a school pennant. Soon there were over 100 hanging on the office walls. More markets followed, as the business grew quickly, but seasonally. To maintain jobs, Todd expanded his market for counter and wall products by purchasing a Columbus installation company. The purchase also helped service Tower’s biggest institutional customer, The Ohio State University. New product developers began calling with other ideas, but nationally distributed institutional shower stalls remain Tower’s “One Big Thing.”

Today, Todd Werstler has built a national company with unique manufacturing capabilities and a wealth of opportunities. His dearest college friends help him guide the company forward.

Still there’s that little personality quirk that won’t allow him to forget, good or bad. Three years ago, Todd Werstler sat in the same Wake Forest Financial Aid office he’d sat in over 35 years before. This time he was setting up the *Werstler Family Scholarship Fund* to ease the financial burden on middle-class kids chasing their Wake Forest dream. With Todd Werstler, what goes around, comes around. Thankfully.

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