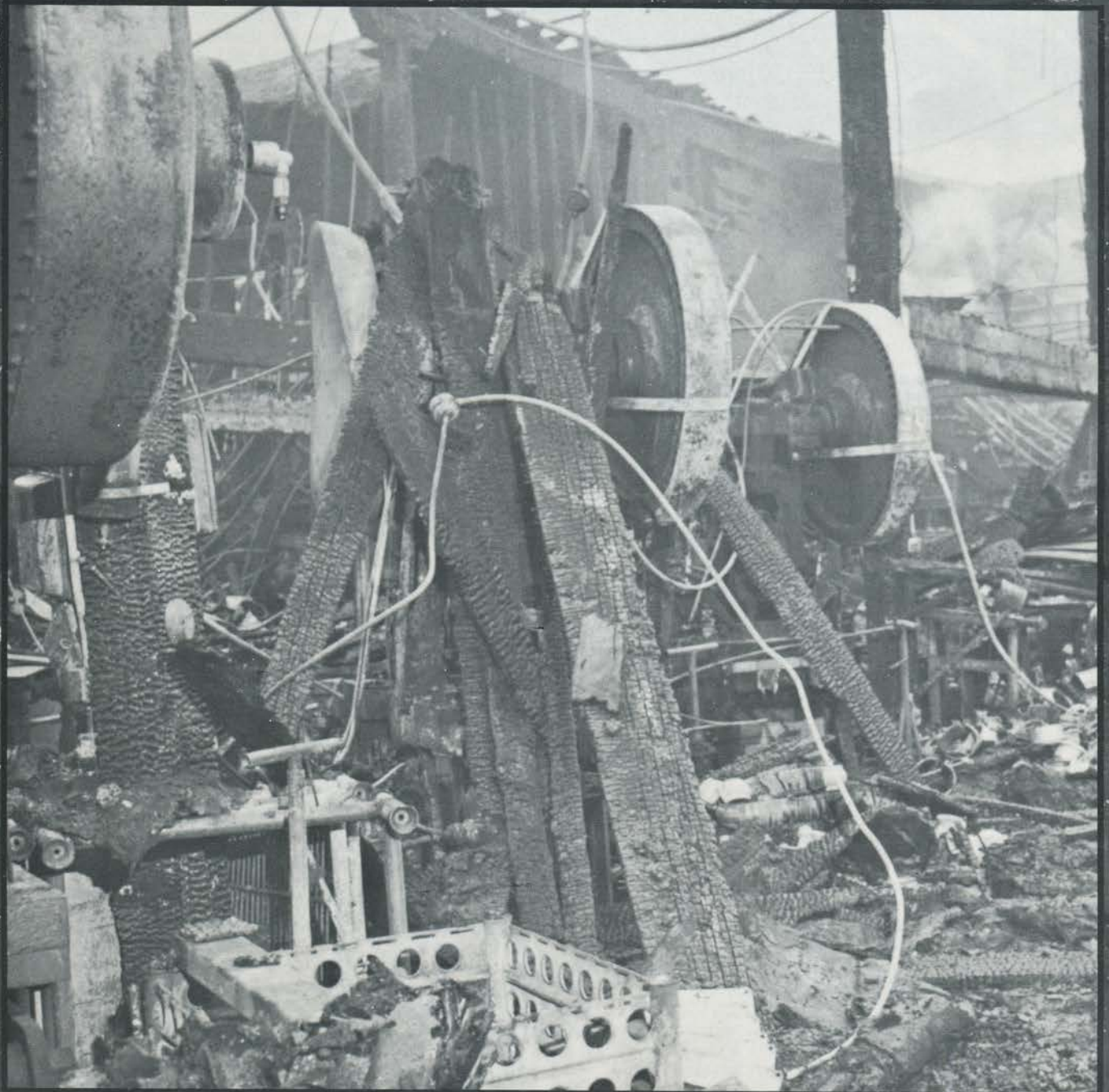


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FROM DESTRUCTION TO PRODUCTION

the Wade experience

By BOB GALVIN

for Western Farm Equipment

The managers and employees of R. M. Wade & Co. Manufacturing Division, in Portland, Oregon, probably will have the cold, rainy morning's event of Jan. 22, 1975 etched indelibly in their mind for years to come. It was on this day, at about 5:45 a.m., that flames had broken through the roof at the south end of one of the company's manufacturing plant buildings. Employees of a neighboring galvanizing company and cafe reported the fire instantly.

Only a few minutes later, Edward H. Newbegin, vice president and director in charge of the manufacturing division, which makes irrigation and sprinkler equipment, was awakened at his home with the jolting news of the fire. Quickly, Newbegin drove to the plant where more than 100 firemen and 23 units were battling the blaze, which began at 4:30 a.m. The sky had turned a bright reddish orange color, and was filled with smoke and drifting cinders.

Below, on the ground, a network of heavy firehoses lay crisscrossed as the firemen sprayed water desperately on the raging inferno.

Meanwhile, the flame-filled building had little air to breathe as all doors and windows were tightly shut. So, inside the structure the temperature, like a tiny volcano, kept mounting. Surely something had to give with such intense heat and pressure, and it was only minutes before something did. Suddenly, the fire reached its climax when the building's wooden beam roof collapsed to the floor, with an explosive and furious crash.

While the fire was still fully involved, Newbegin instructed the firemen to begin spraying down the remaining manufacturing buildings of the plant in case the flames started spreading. Later, as the fire started to choke and lose its resistance to the continual spray of water, the final stage—smoldering—had set in and would continue for hours, late into the day.

Dismissed as a total loss, the building was one of four others comprising the company's manufacturing operation. The event represents the worst disaster in Wade's history, with damages running in excess of a million dollars, according to Newbegin. And even though no fires have occurred at Wade within the past 35 years, the company already has suffered two other disasters—a flood in 1955, and one more in 1968.

Now, almost three months since the conflagration took place, stands a simple, temporary office and warehouse in the far northwest area of Portland's industrial district. Next to these buildings sit the incinerated rubble and charred skeletal remains of the company's central manufacturing plant. Here had taken place the majority of Wade's production output.



JANUARY 22



JANUARY 25



FEBRUARY 14

January 22) Blackened remnants of Wade Mfg. Co.'s main production building on the morning of the devastating fire. January 25) Same machines three days after the fire shown sitting in a protected warehouse and donned with plastic covers. February 14) The same machines back in production at a temporary assembly building located in Northwest Portland's Benaroya Industrial Park. This photo shows Ed Newbegin, right, Vice President of R.M. Wade & Co.'s Manufacturing Division, getting a production progress report from Mechanical Engineer Scott Russell.

Ironically, it was only a few days before the fire that a thorough inspection was made of the company's total manufacturing facilities. And despite the fact that Wade's plant buildings are made of wood and extremely flammable, the inspection revealed the buildings and their content were fire safe. So what would appear to have been the company's most puzzling disaster was, until a police investigation proved the cause clearly evident—arson.

Reflecting on the fire during a recent interview, Ed Newbegin leaned forward in his office chair, and, with a half smile, confessed, "Had we learned about the fire 24 hours after it started, we would have lost everything." Consequently, the disaster could have and almost did put Wade Mfg. Co. out of business. "It's unbelievable when you add it all up," Newbegin added. "One of the biggest costs of a fire is not the physical damage of the fire itself, but the cost of getting back into business," which is where Wade had to spend most of its time and money. Yet, miraculously enough, the company was back in partial production and sending out some orders only ten days after the fire.

Considering the size of the disaster, such rapid recovery would seem impossible. Warren Forsyth, manager of R. M. Wade & Co.'s Manufacturing Division, however, bluntly supplied the crucial reason why the company quickly survived the fire's destruction. "Often, in a disaster situation, what you do about it in the first few hours sets the tone for the kind of recovery you will have," Forsyth said. "That's why we started to save what we could as soon as possible." Luckily, in a sense, the traumatic experiences from the company's previous disasters prepared Wade's employees for their speedy salvage and cleanup campaign following the fire.

And, in a disaster as widespread as the fire which struck Wade Mfg. Co., organization and fastwork obviously are the essential elements linked to Forsyth's corollary. Forsyth, Newbegin and the company's crew demonstrated convincing ability and resilience in restoring what appeared to be the end of Wade's Manufacturing Division.

From about noon on the day the fire occurred until 11:30 that night, Wade's laborers, aided by three front end loading machines, worked diligently and steadily at a gruelling pace of 20 hours a day, removing all of the debris which the fire had left. All of the isles in the building were completely cleared so that each machine worth saving was accessible for maintenance.

Earlier, that same day, two cranes were brought to the fire site, and with their help the fallen beams of the central plant were lifted so that the massive cleanup campaign could commence. Also, to allow the crew to continue cleaning late into the night, Portland General Electric Co. provided three giant night lights, which were mounted on the site.

Two days after the fire the company negotiated a lease for its present temporary office and warehouse. The temporary quarters of Wade Mfg. Co. fortunately are directly next to the burned plant and have ample working space until new facilities can be built. In addition, Wade rented 13,000 feet of space in a building located in Portland's Benaroya Industrial Park, a short distance north of Wade. Most of the machinery was moved to this building and an industrial engineer was hired to assist in the production layout plans.

While the machines were still sizzling hot hours after the blaze, Wade's crew lubricated them with kerosene to prevent rust and corrosion by the rain. This was achieved most effi-

ciently by having each man work with only those machines within his area of production. Then later, the machines were dried off and covered with plastic.

Those machines that were lost in the fire yet whose services were imperative to Wade's production were replaced with leased machines that would do a comparable job. Among the general contents which perished in the fire were offices, machine shops, metal fabrication or so-called "punch press" machines, die machines, countless electric motors, welding shops and storage space. According to Forsyth, close to 50 machines were damaged or lost in the fire. Newbegin said that the machines which manufacture gasket cavities—one of Wade's most essential items for its irrigation equipment—fortunately were saved. The gasket cavity machines, which are custom made and irreplaceable, were restored through a process which required rebuilding of the motors, rewiring of the machines' apparatus, and checking them for warping and distortion.

The ultimate workhorses for the bulk of Wade Mfg. Co.'s production output, however, are the punch press machines, which press metal into specified shapes to fit the variety of irrigation equipment Wade manufactures. More than 250 dies for these machines—some valued at \$10,000 each—were rescued and given an exhaustive rehabilitation treatment which included total dismantling, scouring with steel wool and a generous application of preserving oils.

The fact that the dies were salvageable was the prime reason Wade was able to resume normal production and customer service, said Forsyth. Newbegin claimed the company would have been out of business for six months had it lost the dies.

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DESTRUCTION

(Continued from Page 5)



Mountainous pile of motors burned and destroyed in the fire. They were to be used in the "Traveller" and "Powerroll" self-propelled irrigation systems.



A punch press machine which was nearly destroyed by the fire, shown here back in operation.



Typical view of the disaster.



A front view of Wade Mfg. Co.'s central production building, gutted by fire.



A valve assembly area in one of Wade Mfg. Co.'s temporary buildings.

Wade Mfg. Co. manufactures "Wade Rain" Irrigation Equipment, a complete line of couplers and fittings, and two major self-propelled irrigation systems, dubbed the "Traveller" and the "Powerroll." A distributor of sprinkler and irrigation equipment since 1936 (R.M. Wade & Co., the father company, began in 1865), Wade Mfg. Co. serves about 300 customers, and its equipment is distributed throughout the world. Considering that kind of reputation in lieu of the decimating fire, Wade was left wide open for competitors to lure its existing customers away. But they didn't. "Our competitors were sympathetic with our situation," Forsyth noted, adding that Wade and its competitors are "all in the business of trying to raise food."

Supporting Forsyth's comment further, Newbegin said Wade Mfg. Co.'s competitors were "a lot more helpful than competitive after the fire." Within the entire Northwest there are six companies that manufacture irrigation equipment.

In retrospect, when Newbegin was asked just what other similar manufacturers could do in the face of an experience such as Wade's, he offered this simple and terse advice: "Act fast, be organized and save what you can. The longer you wait, the more you lose." It was through Wade's fast action immediately after the fire that Newbegin attributes the company's ability to resume business in a relatively brief period of time.

Wade is presently making plans for new production facilities to replace the destroyed plant. Newbegin, however, was unable to give details on where the new plant site will be, or when construction of the plant will begin.