

Sequel: this one being written by industry veteran

Sequel Wire and Cable LLC (Sequel) recently announced plans to begin operations early next year in Marshall County at the 50,000-sq-ft Argos Manufacturing Center in Argos, Indiana. Its long-term goal is to triple its size, with the total investment expected to be about \$54 million. The project is expected to create as many as 120 jobs by the end of 2024.

WJI contacted Sequel for more details and found out that the lead person in the venture is Richard Carr, an industry veteran whose career began in 1973 when he joined Ristance. He was general manager of seven locations in the U.S. and Mexico when he left in 1990 to start up Copper-

field, along with two other partners. He served as CEO, and over the years the business grew to \$519 million before it was sold in 2007 to Coleman Cable, where he served as executive vice president of manufacturing. Coleman Cable, in turn, was sold to Southwire in 2014. He served there as director of manufacturing until retiring in 2017.

In a way, this is a news story, but the essence of the Q&A—covering both the big question, “Why not just enjoy retired life?” and a logistical one, “Why start out in an undersized plant that will need expanding?”—made it feel like a natural for Industry Voices. Below, Carr explains his return to the industry.

WJI: Before asking why you are doing this, we’d like to focus on the people end and the location. Who are your partners?

Carr: Sequel Wire and Cable has an ownership team of four people. Our CFO/COO is Denise Feece, who has served as vice president of finance at Copperfield, director of operational accounting and corporate planning at Coleman Cable and vice president of finance of Southwire’s OEM division. James Merritt will serve as an advisor. He previously served as Copperfield’s CFO before it was acquired. Our fourth partner is Greg Miller, a very smart business person and trusted advisor. I’m the CEO.

While every position is as important as the next, from the janitor to the CEO, we believe our team of owners/managers is capable of getting Sequel ready to compete in the wire and cable market. Other positions will be added as our business grows and they become necessary.



From l-r, Sequel Wire principals Greg Miller, Richard Carr and Denise Feece. Not pictured: James Merritt. Photo by Melissa Waldron, Forever Images.

WJI: Will there be a single person in charge of the plant? Will you be able to find enough good hourly workers?

Carr: The plant will be managed by Andy Carr, my son, who has almost 20 years of wire and cable experience. He started up two new facilities—one in Nogales, Arizona,

for Copperfield, and one in El Paso, Texas, for Coleman Cable—and the Argos facility will be his third. Andy’s held various plant management positions throughout his tenure at Copperfield, Coleman Cable and Southwire.

As leaders, it is our job to create an environment that attracts the very best employees. We have had good success at this in the past, and we believe Northern Indiana has a lot of employees we would love to have on our team. We have had an overwhelmingly positive response from

potential employees since our initial announcement in August.

WJI: What specific cable products will you make, and for what sectors?

Carr: Our production focus will be on the OEM sector of the wire and cable industry. We plan to start out by making a wide variety of UL, CSA, and customer-specific “skinny” wires that can be used in the appliance, automotive, RV and other OEM markets.

WJI: Will you be buying new equipment or used or a combination of both?

Carr: To succeed at being low cost in this industry, we believe we have to provide the best-in-class manufacturing equipment that will allow our employees to be highly efficient. We are partnering with Niehoff Endex North America, Inc., which will supply us with the latest technology

Editor’s note: This occasional section is meant to provide a venue for a person in the industry to discuss industry topics of interest, both direct and indirect. To contribute, send an e-mail to editor@wirenet.org.

in fabrication manufacturing techniques. On the insulated side of the business, we have chosen a variety of vendors that are each capable of providing the best technology in wire insulating processes.

WJI: Why Indiana? Why not find a site that is already the size you want to expand to?

Carr: Indiana is home and it's where I was raised. My wife was also raised in Indiana, more specifically, in Bremen, which is in Marshall County. When we married, she wanted to stay in Bremen to take care of her parents in their final days. She was able to do this, and I met my commitment to her while having some success in the wire industry. This area was good for us, and the town of Argos is thrilled to have us build our company in their community. Indiana has some of the lowest utility rates in the country, which is a plus for us. Also, three of the four owners are natives of Marshall County. Being able to give back to the communities that have helped to raise us and to raise our families, is a very satisfying feeling.

WJI: You've had a full, very respectable career: why go through all the intensity of a new start-up and risk a capital investment when you can relax and enjoy retirement?

Carr: Wire and cable is in my blood...it's all I know, and it's what I am passionate about. The industry challenges you to your core at every stage of the process. Every one of your senses is needed to succeed in this business. Over time, your customers, vendors, competitors, and employees become your friends. Even when things aren't going as well as you would like, you have compassion and empathy for that particular situation. To coin an old phrase, "We are a family." Like all families, there are good days and bad days, but I loved being part of them all. Also, I believe our team is ready to deliver, so the investment is well worth the risk.

WJI: Will you be following the Copperfield template?

Carr: We created a different kind of wire company at Copperfield. We wanted to demonstrate that you could treat customers and production employees like kings and still be successful. Our model is similar to Southwest Airlines in that we standardized our equipment, hired only the very best employees and pulled it all together with LEAN techniques. The Copperfield shop floor reflected our philosophy. I still remember one truck driver saying, "Your plant is as clean as a hospital." Those same prin-

ciples and values apply, and can help distinguish us as a company people would want to buy from and work for.

WJI: Have the challenges changed?

Carr: The industry is unique. The manufacturing process can appear to be very simple, but it is also very challenging, and that is especially true if you are driven to be the very best. There are a million things going on at the same time, and your ability to manage them all determines whether you will be successful or not. We are ready and able to do that because that's what we always did.



Richard Carr with son, Andy Carr, the plant manager.

Photo by Melissa Waldron, Forever Images.

WJI: Care to explain the company name?

Carr: The dictionary defines sequel as "work that continues the story or develops the theme of an earlier one." The key to Copperfield's success was our ability to be the low-cost producer. This was achieved by deploying highly efficient, best-in-class manufacturing

equipment and hiring employees that were entrusted and empowered to produce high quality fabricated and insulated wire with pride. This was unique in an industry that was dominated by large organizations that were slowed by layers of management and legacy costs that made them uncompetitive.

We believe these conditions are repeating themselves, and there is once again a great opportunity to take advantage of the current market conditions. The industry is once again dominated by large companies that have grown by acquisitions and become burdened with high costs and slowed by paralyzing bureaucracy. As these large companies have grown, they are focused internally and lose sight of the customer.

WJI: A lot of older subscribers may read this story and think back to the late Vince Rego, who came out of retirement to launch Encore Wire. Is this the same story?

Carr: It is certainly hard not to draw this type of conclusion. I did not know Mr. Rego, so I cannot know what was going through his mind as to why he started Encore. What I can say is that I was not ready to leave this industry. I love the challenges that this industry brings. I love working with the customers, vendors, equipment suppliers and most of all, the team members I get the privilege of working with.

My vision is for Sequel Wire and Cable to quickly become a meaningful player in the industry by employing the latest technologies, hiring the best employees and maintaining an unrelenting focus on taking care of the customer. Now is the time for a sequel! ■