

Engineering success

Matt Davis, president of Wightman, oversees a bustling and expanding engineering services firm

By MICHAEL ELIASOHN
HP Correspondent

BENTON TOWNSHIP — Matt Davis loves to be outside.

“Anything outdoors, the more remote the better,” he said.

Thus his activities include (some in the past) mountain biking, canoeing, trail running, back packing, competing in triathlons (swimming, cycling and running) and sky diving.

Even Davis’ day job takes him outside, though not as much as it used to. He started with Wightman in 1994 and has been its president since March 2015.

Started in 1946 by G.L. Wightman, the company provides expertise in engineering, surveying, architecture, environmental planning, inspection and testing, geographic information systems, interior design, high definition laser scanning and reality capture.

The company’s clients include Native American tribes, county and local governments, industrial and commercial clients, along with clients in education.

In addition to leading the company, Davis, 51, is responsible for planning, funding, design and construction of projects for its tribal clients, as well as municipal building, water, sewer, bridge, wastewater treatment and site-design projects.

The firm’s main office is on Pipestone Road in Benton Township, with other offices in Kalamazoo and Allegan. It became Wightman & Associates in 1971, when G.L. Wightman sold the company. Then in January of this year, the name was changed to simply “Wightman.”

The company is employee-owned. Davis said it has a total of 135 employees at the three offices, of which

about 40 are owners. Ownership is offered to employees depending on “how you represent the company,” he said, and can include anyone, be they receptionists, engineers or whatever. They own different numbers of shares and don’t retain ownership when they retire or leave the company for other reasons.

Davis grew up in the Chicago area, but the mountains drew him to the University of Colorado in Boulder, he said. He graduated from there in 1989 with a degree in civil/architectural engineering.

Then it was back to the Chicago area, where he joined with his father and two brothers in the family’s real estate development company, which specialized in multi-family apartment complexes in the Chicago and the Fort Worth, Texas, areas. (The company is now run by one brother and specializes in commercial development.)

Davis was working with his family, “but that’s not really what I wanted to do,” he said. Plus he and his wife, Kathy, also from the Chicago area, wanted to raise their two sons in a less crowded environment. They have been married for 28 years.

“I think I sent out 50 to 60 resumes,” he said, before being hired by Wightman & Associates.

“It’s been a good place to call home,” he said of Southwest Michigan. Sons Gordon and Mitchell both attended St. Joseph High School and were on the swimming team.

Mitchell graduated three years ago from DePauw University in Greencastle, Ind., in philosophy and economics and now works for the Charles Schwab financial services firm in Indianapolis.

Gordon graduated last year from the University of



Photo provided / Wightman

Matt Davis has worked for the Benton Township-based Wightman engineering firm since 1994 and has been its president since 2015.

Highlights

Name: Matt Davis

Job: President, Wightman, Benton Township

Town: St. Joseph

Fun fact: On his honeymoon in New Zealand 28 years ago, he bungee jumped off a bridge. (His new bride did not.) He described it as “more scary” than skydiving out of a plane, which he also has done.

Michigan in chemical engineering and works in Bend, Ore.

Is their father disappointed that neither of his sons followed in his footsteps, careerwise? No, Davis replied. His sons are grounded, healthy, happy and have a solid work ethic, he said. “I feel good.”

After he and his wife became empty-nesters, they decided to move to Higan Park in Benton Township, close to Lake Michigan. Matt and some Wightman architects designed the house and he and Kathy moved into last September.

Wightman started working for the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians well before its first Four Winds Casino and Resort in New Buffalo Township opened in 2007.

Davis said the tribe had employed a Portage (near Kalamazoo) real estate firm, which needed surveying done of the site for the first Four Winds, so the firm hired Wightman to do it, in 1999 as he recalled.

That in turn led to questions about sewer and water and infrastructure, which were Davis’ field of expertise, and to more work on the first casino. He was proj-

ect manager for the feasibility study, design, permitting, approvals and construction of onsite and off-site improvements, according to the company’s website. “Our firm showed our strength because we could take all the complex issues and distill them,” he said.

“One of my fondest memories at Wightman is going to the (Pokagons’) blessing of the land where the (first) casino is,” prior to the start of construction.

The Pokagon Band now has three additional Four Winds casinos, in or near Hartford, Dowagiac and South Bend, and Wightman has done “pretty much everything outside the buildings” at all of them, Davis said.

Wightman also has done various jobs at the Pokagon community near Dowagiac, including a 43-acre condominium development, com-

munity center and tribal headquarters.

Wightman also has done work for the Nottawaseppi Huron Band of Potawatomi at its Pine Creek Reservation near Athens, south of Battle Creek, including its government center and health center addition. It also did one project for the Lake Superior Chippewa Indians near Bayfield, Wis.

As Wightman’s fourth president, Davis has been overseeing a process that started before he took charge, changing to what he calls a team culture.

Previously, he explained, there were a lot of “independent people” who first met with a client, then prepared the proposal and ultimately oversaw the project.

But the approach now is to have people do what they do best. “It’s about understanding people’s passions, strengths.”

Master of light

Village Lamp Shoppe co-owner Steve Bergman has made a career out of all things lamp-related

By MICHAEL ELIASOHN
HP Correspondent

ST. JOSEPH — “Just so you know, I’ve got 6,000 lamp shades,” Steve Bergman tells a potential customer over the phone. “So if you ever need a shade, just bring the lamp in.”

Bergman, 60, and his wife, Debby, own the Village Lamp Shoppe, which in addition to all those shades, has more than 800 lamps in stock, plus everything one might need for a lamp. Bergman, who has been in the lamp business since he was in high school, also does repairs and makes custom lamps.

The Village Lamp Shoppe was started in the late 1960s – Bergman doesn’t know the exact year – by Bill and Dea Carle in its current location, but it hasn’t always been there. The shop is at 4289 Niles Road in the Scottsdale part of Royalton Township (St. Joseph address).

When the Carles started, Bergman said, they sold lamps and shades up front, while manufacturing lampshades in the rear of the building.

In the mid-1970s, they moved the retail part of the business to the Village Square in Stevensville, so the entire building in Scottsdale could be devoted to

making lampshades.

It also was in the mid-1970s that the Carles asked him to come to work for them and learn to repair lamps. They knew each other because they attended the same church.

Bergman was still attending St. Joseph High School and working at a grocery store until changing part-time jobs; he graduated in 1977. The following year, he and Debby were married.

The retail business returned to Scottsdale around 1978, to the house next door to the current location. The Carles sold the retail business to Elaine Surch in the early 1980s, Bergman said.

When the Carles moved their shade-making business, Lake Shore Studios, to a new building nearby at 4200 Niles Road, the vacated space was occupied by State Farm Insurance. (The nearby Lake Shore Studios operation closed several years ago and the building is now occupied by Green Earth Electronics Recycling. A separate division of Lake Shore Studios still manufactures lampshades in Meridian, Miss.)

Surch sold the Village Lamp Shoppe to the Bergmans in 1991, when it was in the house. Before then, Steve had done lamp repairs for Surch.

Then in 1996, the Berg-



Michael Eliasohn / HP correspondent

Steve Bergman started fixing lamps in the mid-1970s, when still in high school. He and his wife, Debby, have owned the Village Lamp Shoppe in Scottsdale since 1991.

Highlights

Name: Steve Bergman

Job: Co-owner, Village Lamp Shoppe (with wife, Debby)

Town: Royalton Township

Fun fact: Bergman says he can make a lamp out of anything. Example: He once converted a toilet into a floor lamp.

mans bought the building that originally housed the Village Lamp Shoppe, next to the house, then when the insurance office moved out, they moved the lamp shop back in.

In 1979, Bergman started

making lampshade frames for the Carles, which he continued to do until 1996, when he sold the operation to the Carles. Before then, of course, the Bergmans had purchased the Village Lamp Shoppe business.

Their business is strictly mom-and-pop. They have no employees. Steve said it’s usually one or the other in the shop. “We’re rarely both here.”

The Bergmans have four children, who live in Holland, Grand Rapids, Ann Arbor and Detroit, and five grandchildren.

With none of their children choosing to be the next generation in the lamp business, that means when Steve and Debby re-

tire, that likely will be the end of the Village Lamp Shoppe, unless a buyer can be found.

“When it’s done, it’s done,” he said.

Bergman said the Village Lamp Shoppe has drawn customers from as far as Beaver Island in northern Lake Michigan and Jamaica in the Caribbean Sea, as well as much closer, of course. Customers from the Chicago area are common, he said, because they own second homes here. “They’ll bring their repairs here.”

In addition to selling lamps and shades and every conceivable part, plus doing repairs, Bergman also makes custom lamps.

Says Bergman, “I can make a lamp out of anything.”

He once converted a toilet into a floor lamp. In the shop and for sale is a table lamp made of 2,500 pennies, as well as a hanging lamp that incorporates 40 golf balls.

The Bergmans also sell big rocks engraved with “Go Lancers,” “Go Sox,” “Go Spartans” – or whatever a customer’s favorite sports team is. They have the rocks engraved locally.

So what does Steve Bergman like to do when he’s not in the shop? He plays golf, along with softball on his church team.

And during winter? “Relax,” he responded.