



Stealing the Spotlight: **DNC Hydraulics**

By Heather N. Smith



Iron & Steel Technology visited DNC Hydraulics in Rawson, Ohio, USA, for the first article in a series that spotlights the grassroots companies powering today's steel industry while positively impacting the communities in which they operate.

To walk into the Ohio headquarters of DNC Hydraulics is to walk into a true-to-life story of blue-collar innovation, one framed in humble beginnings and still being written by its more than 70 employees.

The scent of machine oil and metal lingers in the air, speaking of work done by hand, of sweat-earned progress. The faint hum of machinery buzzes in the background, just beyond the doors to the facility, underscoring the rhythm of a place where things are built to last.

Just beyond the front door, a wall of history halts visitors in their tracks. It's not just decoration; it's a timeline, a tribute to where the company began compared to how far it has come, a declaration of DNC Hydraulics' identity throughout the years.

Framed photographs stretch across the length of the entry hall, beginning in softly faded black and white and progressing into color the more recent the snapshot. Where once a small gas station stood, now there is a symbol of resilience, of a grassroots family business that only keeps growing with time.

The walls feel alive. Each frame tells a different chapter of the company's humble beginnings, a story of trial, error and tenacity. Each photograph's progression shows new buildings being added, more progress being made and more resources being added to the facility.

There's an undeniable small-town charm to the place, not necessarily in scale but in soul. From the creak of the office floorboards to the warmth in the receptionist's smile and greeting, it's clear this isn't just a business; it's a labor of love, grounded in legacy.

Here, the American Dream isn't just framed on the wall. It greets you at the door.

**“An American Dream
come true is what it's
been.”**

Over the years, the company has expanded at a rapid pace: erecting five new buildings in just four years, growing from a modest team of around 20 to a thriving workforce of around 74, and establishing itself as an innovator in the hydraulics service market. However, the most striking feature of DNC Hydraulics isn't its rapid expansion; it's the people behind it.

Dave Conaway, who founded DNC Hydraulics in 1991 along with his wife Carolyn Conaway, knows a thing or two about perseverance. Having been let go

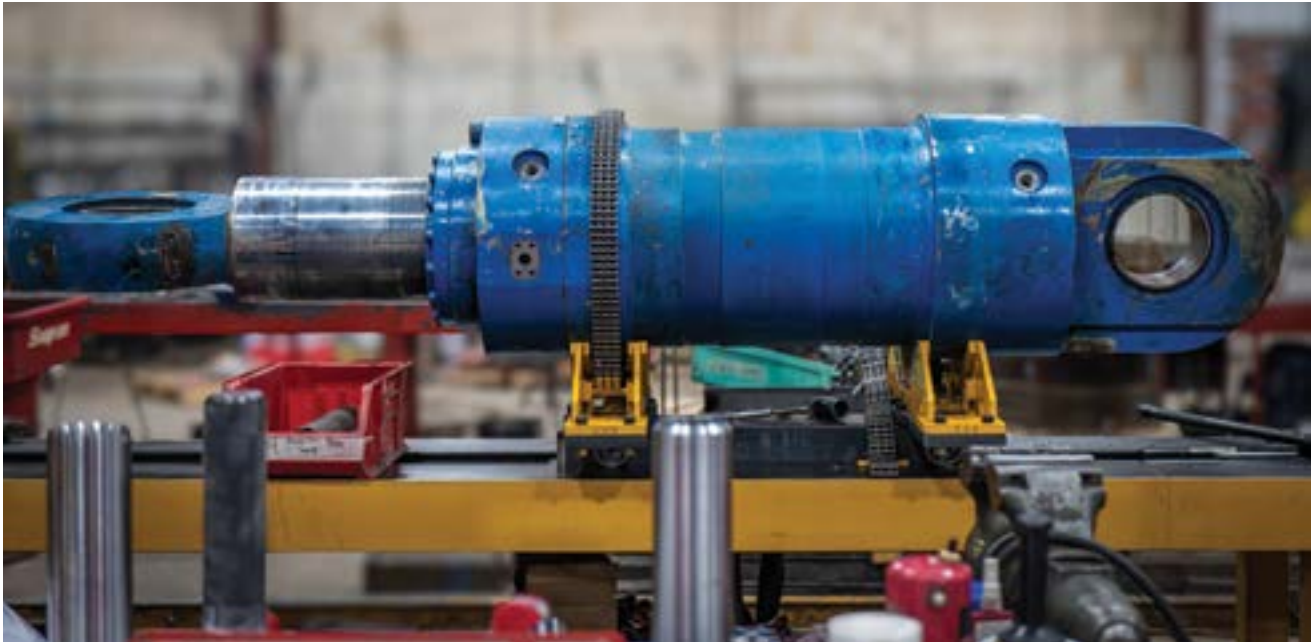


Dave and Carolyn Conaway founded DNC Hydraulics in 1991.

from multiple jobs, he turned to hydraulic repair, a skill he learned from his father at Lee's Air Tool Service. In the early days of the business, necessity drove innovation — cylinders were once pulled apart using nothing more than a tree and a tractor. Today, the company has been passed on to Dave's son, chief executive officer and president of DNC Hydraulics Cody Conaway, employing cutting-edge technology with an emphasis on innovative solutions. With an educational background in organizational growth and development from the University of Toledo, Cody has played a crucial role in structuring the company for long-term success.

Ken Rood's journey into the company was just as pivotal. Once just a friend of Cody's, he became vice president of business development at DNC Hydraulics after being laid off during the COVID-19 pandemic in August 2020. His background in sales and business development, combined with his previous experience selling DNC Hydraulics merchandise and designing its logo, made him a natural fit. His arrival marked a turning point, as their business had flatlined during 2020. However, Ken's arrival helped them navigate the pandemic challenges and ultimately double the company's size in two years.

Despite the economic uncertainty of the pandemic, DNC Hydraulics ensured its employees remained busy



and employed. With most of the world halted due to COVID-19 regulations, their company was no different. They had already planned to build a new facility to house their seal equipment as the seal business grew but were unable to hire any outside contractors. Therefore, the plan to keep their staff employed by having them build the seal building was born.

“Providing a different, better solution.”

Throughout the pandemic, they saw it as an opportunity to innovate, develop new business strategies and focus on customer support during the difficult economic period. Since, Cody and Ken have made strategic decisions that have propelled DNC Hydraulics to new heights. In a constantly evolving steel industry, DNC Hydraulics still manages to set itself apart from the rest in the five vertically integrated divisions they offer. As Cody said, “Innovation is at the heart of everything we do. We focus on providing hydraulic solutions, not just products. Our people understand that mindset and are aligned around it — always looking for ways to do things better.”

The service that started it all, hydraulic cylinder service, includes processes such as high-velocity oxygen fuel thermal spraying, industrial chrome plating or electroless nickel plating. The company says their rebuilds exceed original equipment manufacturer quality. They provide in-house manufacturing, modification, fabricating and repair on cylinders from 1 lb. to 40,000 lbs.

The second service they offer is pump service; specializing in repairing, rebuilding and testing hydraulic

pumps and motors to ensure performance and extended equipment life. All quality control testing is done in-house.

Ken called the seal manufacturing division their “biggest asset except people and the biggest game changer.” One of only three companies in the U.S. that creates up to 58-inch seals in-house, DNC tailors them to meet their customers’ needs. As part of their innovation, the seals team invented spring-loaded seals so that seals last longer and won’t break down as fast.

“I see us continuing to push the boundaries of sealing technology — developing longer-lasting solutions for customers operating in the harshest environments,” said Cody.

DNC Hydraulics also provides oil reduction services, even having their own recycled oil on-site to heat the facility. Leak points are identified, and the DNC team determines the right sealing material based on temperature, groove specs and squeeze. “The number one goal is to develop leak-free and greaseless seal technology to avoid contaminants,” Ken explained. They then reseal them in-house based on this data. They estimate that they can reduce oil by over 70%, thus reducing cost and increasing safety, productivity, efficiency and overall aesthetics.

The company also has 16 trucks and a semi-truck for their on-site repair program. They travel throughout Wisconsin, Ohio, Michigan, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, Indiana and Arkansas. They fix a range of hydraulic problems, mostly in heavy industrial applications, but also support agricultural, construction, transportation, and recycling customers.

In addition to their five services, DNC also provides troubleshooting, different finishes and in-house painting for the final products.

“We build trust — that’s the name of the game.”

DNC Hydraulics isn’t just about machinery — it’s about the people who make it all work. With its five divisions, a significant emphasis on unity and a strong emphasis on youth, the company has cultivated a workplace that values growth and opportunity. Their “wall of fame” celebrates employees and their internship program.

DNC Hydraulic’s internship program hosts two interns every year, typically rotating with two-week on and two-week off schedules. They support technical education by partnering with schools like Apollo Career Center, University of Northwestern Ohio, Ohio State’s Wooster campus and Mill Stream Career Center.

One such intern, Aaliyah, started her journey cleaning and painting. Eventually, she moved to welding, then working on a machine in seal production before transitioning to helping with quote processes. When she decided where she wanted to be, DNC Hydraulics supported her in getting her two-year marketing degree.

Another example was a student who worked in high school painting and cleaning at the facility. He was offered full tuition for hydraulic school, with the condition that he returned to work at DNC Hydraulics after graduation.

Ultimately, the internship program was designed to develop talent, provide hands-on experience and create a pipeline of skilled workers who understand the company’s culture and operations.

The company also values longevity, with their longest tenured employee celebrating over 19 years with DNC.

They have also made significant strides in forming lasting relationships with major players in the steel industry. Their ability to deliver reliable and innovative hydraulic solutions has helped them secure partnerships with various companies.

One of their most recent achievements was finalizing an agreement with Cleveland-Cliffs Inc., a process that took about a year to negotiate. Some other companies they work with include United States Steel Corporation, Gerdau, Whirlpool, Steel Dynamics Inc., Honda, ProTec Building Services, Waupaca Foundry, North Star BlueScope and Ball Corp.

“They shouldn’t worry about their hydraulic assets; they should worry about running steel,” Cody said. “They have enough issues going on, so if we can eliminate the pain with what we’re doing for them, then that’s one step forward.”

Beyond business, the company takes pride in giving back to its community. They actively support the Women’s Resource Center, local fire departments and high school technology programs, in addition to fostering relationships with colleges such as the University of Northwestern Ohio and The Ohio State University. Their community outreach efforts reflect a broader commitment to making a lasting impact beyond their industry.





“We treat our team members, customers and vendors the way we’d want to be treated.”

The company’s customer service philosophy is simple, it’s what Cody calls the Golden Rule: “We treat our team members, customers and vendors the way we’d want to be treated. That means picking up the phone, responding quickly, and doing everything we can to support each customer’s unique needs. Not all jobs are the same — some are more urgent than others — and we adjust accordingly.”

As DNC Hydraulics looks to the future, their goals remain clear: expand into new markets, continue driving

innovation and maintain their commitment to customer service and employee development. By investing in technology, strategic planning and their people, they look to ensure their continued success in an industry that never stands still.

Overcoming resistance to change and embracing new technologies remains a key challenge, but DNC Hydraulics continues to advocate for new approaches. In doing so, the company works with younger engineers who are open to new ideas and willing to try new solutions.

“If the U.S. steel market is going to thrive, its suppliers — including us — must deliver unmatched reliability and performance. That means helping our customers’ equipment run longer and more efficiently,” Cody said. “The U.S. steel industry can’t be the best in the world unless its hydraulic components and vendors are the best too.”

At DNC Hydraulics, every phone call is answered promptly, every challenge is met with a solution and every success is built on a foundation of honesty, dedication and a commitment to exceeding expectations. ♦

