

EA reader profile

Finding a niche in an adoptive country

Besides having arguably the best name in the industry, Hartmut Hillenhagen also carries a wealth of knowledge and experience with coil winding and automation.

The Winding Automation, Inc., president has worked with coil winding machines since his days at Aumann in Espelkamp, Germany, a small town about 60 miles west of Hannover. He moved to America in 1985 to work at Aumann's newly founded North American outfit in Fort Wayne, Ind.

"I still remember those pre-Internet and smartphone days," he recalls, "Arriving here with two suitcases and only knowing one other person that left shortly after my arrival, I was driving around with the yellow pages for the addresses and the street map to find them."



Hartmut Hillenhagen

He found them. Since then, Hillenhagen has risen through the ranks of Aumann North America at a steady pace, going from service engineer to general manager to president.

The company became an independent group in 2006, ending its exclusive relationship with Aumann in order to become a "solutions provider" by adding other European equipment manufacturers to its portfolio.

Winding Automation, Inc., began work under its new name at the beginning of 2017, handling integrated production line projects and offering standard machines with heavy-duty construction and control and drive technology. The company's maturation process included innovative business practices such as the meshing of automation and manufacturing.

"The right kind of automation is absolutely vital for the manufacturing future of this country, to produce at the highest quality and keep manufacturing costs low," Hartmut told *Electrical Apparatus*. "This creates better and higher paying jobs."

Having grown up in the German dual educational system—where companies pay for hands-on training and the government for schooling—Hillenhagen sees the value in apprenticeships and proper training.

"The government should do all they can to enable everyone to get the appropriate education and skill set," he contends. "I went through a three-year toolmaking apprenticeship, learning that trade from the ground up, before going to electrical engineering school."

That experience and training methodology instilled a positive motivation that translated to his life outside of work, Hillenhagen says. "The working environment in a small company, with few opportunities to delegate anything . . . that has allowed me to get and maintain a can-do attitude for anything in life. Nothing is impossible if you put your mind to it and find the right partners."

Possibility for Mr. Hillenhagen has materialized into a love for travel and animals. He has two German Shepherds, a 10-year-old, 65-lb. rescue dog from Kalamazoo named Ginger, and a two-year-old, 120-lb. purebred named Zeus.

Despite being half the size, Ginger's seniority makes her the "Alpha female" of the duo, Hillenhagen says. "I always had a love for any animals. We have some 50 koi and goldfish in our pond. It's the unconditional love of animals that I would never want to miss."

Besides all things animal-related, Hartmut enjoys traveling and adventure. This comes with the territory of being president of a company with a global network.

"In our business, we have customers all over the world, which allowed me to frequently travel to Europe, but also to Asia and New Zealand." The latter, he says, is "my favorite place on earth, with awesome landscapes, and full of friendly people."—Charlie Barks **EA**

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