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## History of Westerfeld Oil, 1938 thru 2005

*By Leon Westerfeld*

On December 1, 1938, at age 28, Ernest Westerfeld, his wife Lorena and two small children, Leon & Jeanette, left the rented dairy farm that had been their livelihood; for the unknown, which was a route delivering petroleum products to farmers. Ernest borrowed \$1,000, purchased a 1936 Chevrolet truck with a 400 gallon tank which included a route serving about 25 farmers in parts of the townships of Lessor, Angelica, Hartland & Maple Grove, and became a commissioned employee of Wadhams Oil Co.

Living on Rural Route 2 Bonduel, in a \$25 per month rented house, and operating out of a Bulk Plant in Zachow, that first year was indeed a trial. Products at that time were 70 octane Mobilgas (12c per gal), 78 octane Mobilgas with Ethyl (14c per gal), Kerosene (.10 per gal), Mobilheat Lite (8c per gal) and Tractor Fuel, a low octane gasoline that powered the first tractors. Mobiloil, Metro, Mobilgrease & Mobil Gearlube rounded out the available merchandise.

Light Oils were brought into the Green Bay Terminal by boat, stored, then delivered by railroad car to the Zachow Bulk Plant, where Ernest was then held accountable. He loaded the fuel into his 400 gallon tank truck, went from farm to farm, manually carrying 5 gallon buckets of fuel to the farmers 55 gallon storage drums. Ernest put in long days, delivering to his regular customers, then visiting additional farmers who may have recently purchased their first tractor, asking for their business: Winters saw him delivering fuel oil for customers space heaters, as central heating was yet to come.

Four Wadhams Stations; in Pittsfield on Hwy 29, Angelica on Hwy 29, Briarton on Hwy

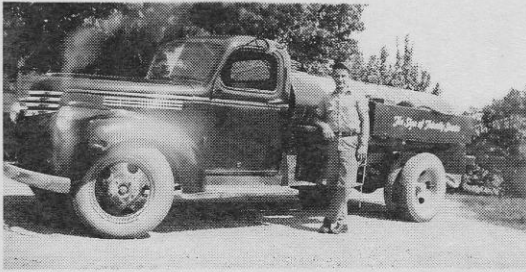


Ernest with his new truck

47 and Radtke Chevrolet, in Zachow; had Visible Pumps (later converted to electrical, with clock faced meters) and underground storage tanks & signs, owned by Wadhams Oil Co. These dealers, which were located in small towns now bypassed by relocated super highways, were Ernest's responsibility to service. The deliveries could be made as gravity drops, by compartment, from the 400 gal truck tank, saving the back breaking task of delivering via the 5 gallon can. Wadhams stored and kept title to the product until it was delivered to the consumer, and a commission was paid only when the homeowner or farmer paid Wadhams. When customers did not pay Wadhams, it was deducted from Ernest's commission check, thus the start of his Accounts Receivable.

With the advent of World War II and rationing, problems with stamps and shortages were rampant, but the farming community never suffered because of a lack of fuel, as foodstuffs for the war were needed and gas for that effort was always available.

In 1946, business had increased through Ernest's hard work, to the point where a second truck was needed and purchased, for \$1,526. Wadhams Oil Co., now a division of Socony-Vacuum Oil Co., furnished a 600 gallon truck tank, which had a pump, meter & hose, minimizing manual labor. Various drivers were hired, and left, until April 1947, when Augie Heller took



Augie Heller beside one of the Wadhams trucks.

the route and stayed. In the fall of 1948, Ernest & Lorena Westerfeld built their home in Zachow, which was also utilized as an office. Later, a 3 stall garage was built and used as a warehouse. Ernest received a ten year service pin from Socony-Vacuum Oil Co., Wadhams Division, on Dec. 1, 1948, citing his tremendous growth in gallonage over his 10 year employment. The end of rail delivery to the Zachow Bulk Plant came in 1952, henceforth, fuel would be delivered by semi-transport trucks, originally in 4,800 gal loads.

In 1952, Ernest purchased all the tanks & equipment previously supplied by Socony-Vacuum, and became their exclusive area distributor, with the "WESTERFELD OIL CO", name proudly displayed on invoices, trucks & advertising. This move allowed membership in the Wisconsin Petroleum Association., the state organization for petroleum jobbers. Becoming a distributor meant a substantial investment, as now gas & heating oil (light oils) had to be paid for by the transport load, with drums & cases of motor oil by the semi truck load. This was a relatively innovative approach to petroleum marketing, especially in rural Northeastern Wisconsin, and Westerfeld Oil was proud to be on the forefront.

Ironically, the Village of Bonduel was not included in Westerfeld Oil's marketing area, but after receiving special permission, our first new Mobil Gas Station was built in Bonduel. In August of 1954, Vern Hinz became its first lessee/operator. The location had two 1,000 and one 500 gal buried tanks, with three Model 80 Martin & Schwartz pumps on the island, flanked by two racks of Mobil oil in glass refillable bottles,

at 25 cents per quart.

Ernest retired from route delivery in 1954, his daily task the past 16 years, hiring Gerald Heling to take his route. Julius Wnuk was hired in 1956 to service an existing route in the Pulaski area. A semi-tractor & trailer unit was purchased in 1957 to haul our own product, with Ernest making the trip to Green Bay to get a load early in the morning, prior to his regular work day.

In the summer of 1958, our 2nd Station was constructed, on Hwy 32 in Pulaski, with underground storage tanks large enough to



Vern Hinz Mobil Station  
Later it became Del Zulegers Station

accommodate full transport loads. This station helped Westerfeld Oil achieve its first 1,000,000 gallon sales year, quite an accomplishment in rural Wisconsin.

Leon Westerfeld was attending Whitewater State College (1959), but reluctantly came home when Gerald Heling left for other employment. Now it was father/son; was this the start of a family business? How well this would work, only time would tell.

Realizing any growing business would have bumps in the road, Augie Heller, our 12 year employee left, taking a competing route and many customers. Notwithstanding, Westerfeld Oil forged ahead with its first expansive buyout or purchase, in 1961, a neighboring jobber, Peters Oil Co. of Suamico. It consisted of a bulk plant, truck and established route with customers, in an area north of Green Bay, where Robert Wnuk stayed on as driver.

Upon Mobil's urging, Westerfeld Oil entered the wholesale TBA business in 1962, stocking & selling Mobil branded Tires, Batteries, Accessories (fan belts, filters,

hoses, etc.) and Specialties (car polish, washer fluid, anti-freeze, chemicals, etc.). The marketing area at the time included all the Mobil stations in the Green Bay area, later expanded through buyouts, to include all of Northeastern Wisconsin.

In the fall of 1963, Westerfeld Oil hired Jeanette's husband, Bob Peterson, for equipment maintenance and semi driver. They built a home on land adjacent to the Suamico Bulk Plant, solidifying customer services in this area.

Throughout Westerfeld Oil's first 25 years in business (1938-1963), Lorena Westerfeld served as Historian, Mother, Wife, Office Staff, Cook, Secretary, Confidant and Photographer. She was the inspiration and motivation behind recording Westerfeld Oil's 25 year history, we



gratefully thank her.

A 1965 Westerfeld Oil sales ticket showed selling prices as follows: Mobil Regular, 18c per gal.; Mobil Premium, 22c per gal.; plus 4c Federal and 6c State Tax. Mobilheat Lite was 17c per gal. and a case of Mobil oil Special in 24/1 qt cans was \$1.59 per gal. Lyle Eichman was hired to take Leon's fuel route, enabling him move into the office. It was short lived, however, as he then went to Seymour to salvage customers in this expanded area of responsibility. Jim Braun was later hired for this route and stayed a number of years. Records showed Westerfeld Oil achieved 2 million gallons of petroleum sales in 1965.

Westerfeld Oil Co. Inc. was given its perpetual existence through incorporation on July 1, 1966, with Ernest & Lorena Westerfeld exclusive stockholders. Shortly thereafter they began gifting shares equally to each of their 4 children; Jeanette, Leon, Carol & Dennis.

In November 1969, Dennis returned from

the Army and joined Westerfeld Oil as an employee, driving the Pulaski route. Now three family siblings were involved in the business.

Mobil's latest image, round stainless steel pumps were installed at our stations in Bonduel, Pulaski, (operated for years by Elmer Ragen) & recently acquired Melchers, Seymour location. Our truck fleet in 1970 stood at 5 delivery trucks, 1 transport, 1 TBA Van & 1 pickup.

The Shawano area, with its bulk plant, propane, delivery truck and route driven by Duaine Gast, and Mobil stations in Shawano and West Shore were added through the acquisition of Jerry Naeyaert's, Mac's Oil Co., our neighboring Mobil jobber to the west. At about this same time the gasoline shortage of 1972 hit unexpectedly. Westerfeld Oil was put on allocation by our supplier, Socony-Mobil Oil Co., resulting in us placing our customers on allocation, which was not popular. The State of Wisconsin controlled pricing, supply, and with redundant paperwork, it was not a pleasant era, business wise.

When Mobil Oil Corp. began marketing oil fired equipment, we naturally entered the furnace business; selling, servicing and installing the oil fired Mobil "Home Comfort" furnace and Hot Water Heater. Our Sheet Metal Shop in Zachow developed with a full complement of tin-smith equipment for our full time installer and serviceman, Carl Bublit. Oil furnaces popularity later waned when natural gas pipelines went through an area and utility subsidies under priced oil equipment. Van's Oil Co., a service station and route in East DePere, was added to our growing company holdings in 1973, with Emil VanWassenhoven staying on as driver.

Leland Brusky joined Westerfeld Oil as a Suamico driver, later transferring to drive transport. He stayed for 20 years, retiring in 1993. Fred Gueller drove the Zachow route for a number of years. In 1974, Ernest and Lorena retired their positions as President and Sec/Treas. of Westerfeld Oil, remaining as Directors, but selling their remaining shares to Westerfeld Oil in return for a funded retirement. Leon took over as President, Dennis as Vice Pres. and Jeanette as Sec/Treas. Although Ernest was no longer a majority stockholder, his input and opinion still ruled, with regular meetings held to decide important issues like expansion, staffing and





Top L-R: Jim Bergsbaken, Jack Olson, Roger Peterman, Ken VanDeHey, Kathy Forbt, Ernest Westerfeld, Bob Peterson, Lowell Blake, Mary Steinke, Dale Peterson, Wendy Olson, Jim Rentmeester, Doug Stacie, Leland Brusky, Marlene Schmidt, Jerry Grosskruetz, Kneeling: Kit Kasube, John Sweete, Leon Westerfeld, Diane Dombrowski, Teri Westerfeld, Gertie Hein, Jeanette Peterson, Nancy Meilke, Betty Wendland, Dennis Westerfeld.

large purchases.

Outgrowing the small office attached to Ernest & Lorraine's house, an office was constructed adjacent to the existing warehouse (Carl Hafeman's old Zachow Blacksmith Shop), in the Zachow Bulk Plant complex. Shortly thereafter we celebrated Gertie Heins 10 years of service. Mobil's new image, "bricking the face off" our stations in Bonduel, Pulaski, Shawano, East DePere, Black Creek & Seymour was accomplished in 1977. To remain competitive in retail sales, a major change in marketing would take place, as Westerfeld Oil converted the first of many stations to self-service, installing canopies and user friendly MPD's. This meant instead of leasing the station to an operator, our own employees would operate the C-

Store/Snack Shop, with Self-Service Gasoline sales. The resulting increased sales led to Westerfeld Oil being recognized as an innovative petroleum marketer by both Mobil Oil Co. and counterparts in the petroleum industry.

Cecil was one of the locations where we converted and updated the old Max Evans Garage by demolishing Froelich's corner tavern and expanding the drive, with canopy, to Cecil's main intersection, converting the garage to a C-Store.

Mobil Oil Corp. appointed Leon to the Wisconsin Mobil Distributors Council, an honorary position where 6 representatives from Wisconsin would meet with Mobil management to discuss jobber relations. This later led to an elected position on Mobil's National Distributors



Left to Right: Jeanette, Dennis, Lorena, Ernest, Leon in a family photo sporting new Westernfeld Oil Jackets.

Council, which met in Fairfax, Virginia; Mobil's National Headquarters. It was at one of these meetings that Westernfeld Oil was inducted into Mobil's "Circle of Excellence" a select group of Mobil Oil's 50 largest distributors, nationwide, where we stayed for 3 consecutive years, 89-90-91.

The slogan, "Serving Northeastern Wisconsin and the Fox River Valley" came about through the purchase of Marston Bros. of Appleton, from Joe Marston. This purchase of a bulk plant, trucks and industrial customers would involve increased emphasis on sales of lubricating oil, TBA, wholesale gasoline and retail fuel oil delivery to a largely metropolitan area. To solidify market share, Westernfeld Oil additionally purchased a 50% ownership of Appleton Oil in 1982. The logistics and distance from Zachow dictated that certain portions of that business be better handled by a local, on site representative. Our association with Chuck Beecher, who worked for a time as Westernfeld Oil salesman, terminated in him purchasing our ownership of Appleton Oil.

For a period of time delivery of lubricating oil out of our oil warehouse adjoining Appleton Oil was accomplished, with Roger Huss driving the stake oil delivery truck.

A Burroughs Posting Machine with striped ledger cards was our entry from manual to automated bookkeeping. It was short lived as just 5 years later, we converted to a Burroughs

Computer, with Jeanette & Gertie traveling to Texas to learn the software.

They in turn, then taught Nancy Mielke and Cheryl Kirchenwitz, our office staff, how to operate the software. Betty Wendland joined our office staff shortly thereafter, in 1987.

Throughout our history, Westernfeld Oil treated their employees fairly, paying 100% of full time employees health, dental, life & disability insurance, uniform allowance, with flexible work schedules. We had incentive programs, a commission schedule to reward increased sales, and a Retirement Plan funded entirely by Westernfeld Oil, encouraging savings plans. A vacation schedule afforded each employee planned time off.

Teri Westernfeld, back home with her 4 year Liberal Arts Degree from Carroll College became Westernfeld Oil's newest full time employee in 1983, working with the growing list of employees hired to manage the Self-Service Stations. Each location brought with it special challenges, with personnel, equipment and C-Store inventory. At our 1983 company party (held annually), Harvey Rehn was honored for 10 years of employment.

Appleton Oil, Rentmeester Oil (Jim & Curt Rentmeester), Van's Oil (Emil VanWassenhoven); Bonduel Oil (Chuck Druckrery & Don Cyganek), Quade Oil (Chuck Quade), B & B Oil Co. Krakow, (Ray Brezinski), Black Creek Oil Co., and Mobil consignee's in Gillett (Ken Schneider), Suring (Milt Schuetzel), Black Creek (Elroy McNiesh), Wrightstown (Jim Frelich), Green Bay (Jack & Wendy Olson), and Seymour (Clarence Nelson), were buyouts and acquisitions of Westernfeld Oil that took place over the years. We often kept current employees who would then operate under the Westernfeld Oil name, with our benefits. The North Central Public Service acquisition in 1985, afforded Westernfeld Oil the opportunity to dual brand "Phillips". Its widely disbursed network of bulk plants and routes; Algoma, Luxemburg, Kaukauna and Green Bay netted Westernfeld Oil only one keeper, that being the Kaukauna Bulk Plant, with Ken VanDeHey on the route, who stayed for 10 years. The Phillips brand was not readily accepted, so after 5 years of promoting Phillips light and heavy oils

throughout Northeastern Wisconsin by branding stations in Bonduel, Algoma, Seymour and even Upper Michigan, we cancelled that contract. The construction of our ground-up Mobil C-Store & Self Serv on Hwy 29 & Airport Rd in Shawano came in 1986. Dale Peterson joined Westerfeld Oil as a route driver out of the Suamico Bulk Plant, later transferring to semi-driver. Mike Boerst ran the TBA route for a number of years. Lowell Blake drove the Black Creek route for several years.

Becoming more popular was the concept of bulk motor oil. Although Westerfeld Oil purchased bulk oil by the semi-load as early as 1980, we became a Mobil Lubricant Repackager in 1985, to repackage and label Mobil branded industrial, commercial and retail oils in 55 & 30 gal. drums and 5 gal containers. We delivered out of Zachow in bulk to paper mills, industrial accounts and large truckers & commercial users throughout Northeastern Wisconsin. Customers using pre-packaged oils were delivered and serviced by personnel from our warehouses in Green Bay, Wendy & Jack Olson; Appleton, Roger Huss; Marinette, John Dettman; & Zachow, where our warehousing grew to 20 different oil storage tanks, affording a diversity of specific products to the needs of our customers. We employed Mike McNabb, an industrial engineer, as salesman for a short time, servicing our Paper Mill, Truckers & Industrial customers. Sales of lubricating oil in bulk, totes, drums and packages were in excess of 300,000 gals. in 1991.

Along with the acquisition and Phillips branding of Bonduel Oil in 1986, we continued employment of principals Chuck Druckrey and Don Cyganek. Also kept were their route drivers Doug Druckrey & Roger Peterman, station manager Jim Bergsbaken, & office manager, Marlene Schmidt.

Never really being able to integrate their employees, customers and/or business into ours, Bonduel Oil continued its own demise. Our Bonduel, Mobil Station, commonly referred to as Del's Mobil, discontinued gasoline and was eventually sold, with Del Zuleger retiring after over 20 years of operating that station.

With his recently acquired Concordia Business Management BA, and six previous

years on the PMA W Board of Directors, Leon was elected 3rd Vice President of the Petroleum Marketers Association of Wisconsin in 1989, leading to the Presidency in 1992/93. This was time consuming, gratis work, requiring hours of travel with meetings in Madison and throughout Wisconsin. It was, however, an honor and a privilege to serve in that capacity, and a way to give back to the industry that had helped him and his company, Westerfeld Oil.

In December 1988, Westerfeld Oil celebrated 50 years in business. Cal Steward, Seymour driver & Bill Treptow, transport & TBA, were honored for 10 years of service. Robert Whuk retired after 27 years of service.

This era was perhaps the peak of our growing years, as we had over 60 full time employees; in sales, service, delivery, office, management and retail C-Store managers, plus 35 part time employees. We operated nine C-Stores with Self-Serv Gasoline, plus transport delivery of branded gasoline to another 25 Mobil dealers throughout Northeastern Wisconsin and the Fox River Valley.

Westerfeld Oil owned/operated 10 Bulk Plants and 4 Lubricant Warehouses in Zachow, Green Bay, Marinette & Appleton. Our Fleet of 22 vehicles included transports, lube vans, delivery trucks, stake trucks and utility service vehicles. Sales exceeded 20 Million dollars annually, to over 4,000 farm, commercial, residential and industrial accounts.

Westerfeld Oil's philosophy through its growing years was: "To build an organization that offered excellent service and products to its customers, gave reward and recognition to its employees, gained the respect of competitors and fellow men, and was an asset to each community in which we operated." That philosophy held then, and continued through the rough years that followed.

In 1992, M & I Bank of Shawano, tightened restrictions on our loans and, without warning, called in our entire loan portfolio. The formality of yearly renewal, with mortgages on all our property was insufficient. After 50 plus continuous years of business relations with M & I and its predecessors, Valley Bank of Shawano and 6 Farmers State Bank of Zachow and Cecil, han-



dling our Retirement and Trust Accounts, Real Estate and Operating Loans, Checking, Payroll and depositories of all our receipts; they asked that we pay off all our loans. This bank decision would change the direction of Westerfeld Oil into the future. Needless to say, corporate and family meetings were held where different options were contemplated, mulled over, voted on, rehashed and revised. Professional assistance was engaged, with family stockholders, Jeanette, Leon & Dennis, basically formulating drastically curtailed plans for the future.

Our first plan was to eliminate the need for semi replacement by selling our two transports to Klemm Tank Lines, which we did, having them do our hauling. Our 2nd plan was to sell off our Oil Lubricant business; eliminating our 4 outlying motor oil warehouses, oil inventory, trucks and employees at those locations. Discussion with Halron Oil resulted in them purchasing the entire motor oil portion of our business.

Needless to say, M & I was at the closing to accept proceeds received.

In 1993, Dennis approached Jeanette & Leon, to sell his shares of Westerfeld Oil stock. Being a closed family corporation, lengthy discussion was held on establishing a value. The result was that Leon and Westerfeld Oil would each purchase half. In April of 1994 Dennis resigned as an officer, employee and stockholder of Westerfeld Oil, leaving Leon & Jeanette as owners.

Another significant stockholder meeting was held November 1995, where, due to environmental concerns of PECFA cleanups, liability for underground tanks, route gallonage decreasing and age of current stockholders; that a buyer be sought for the entire company.



Cecil after remodeling as a C Store & Self Serve in 1986. Note the absence of Mobil's new image.

Cenex and their local Co-op locations; Pulaski-Chase, Black Creek, Shawano Equity, Bay Lakes, Seymour, DePere, and Kaukauna Co-op's indicated an interest in routes & stations, with Westerfeld employees keeping their respective jobs. Don Staszak indicated an interest in our Zachow office and warehouses.

The sellout was completed in 1997, with proceeds paying off M & I loans.

Additional money available was commandeered by M & I Bank as security for our 7 environmental underground storage tank cleanups in progress, which they financed through the State of Wisconsin PECFA Program.

The office was moved to Cecil, leaving Westerfeld Oil with three retail locations: Shawano Truck Stop, Bonduel Oil Station and Cecil C-Store, managed by Teri Westerfeld. In receiving partial proceeds from the sale, Leon & Jeanette would retire from Westerfeld Oil.

The PECFA cleanup on the Zachow property, started in 1995 went bad when the contractor (not following PECFA rules) removed ten times the amount of soil authorized, sending a reprehensible bill to Westerfeld Oil, which M & I Bank refused to honor, as not authorized thru PECFA.

The result was a lawsuit that was drawn through the courts to a final trial in 1999 where a judge ruled Westerfeld Oil responsible for the entire bill, interest and penalties. The result being a forced sale of our Shawano Truck Stop in July of 2002, with the entire proceeds used to satisfy the lawsuit.

Bonduel Oil Station, with the rerouting of Hwy 29, lost gas sales and became basically a tire repair shop. Sales went down and employee problems led to the decision in 2001 to close the station & pulling the underground tanks. It sat empty for four years until a sale of the building was finalized in 2005.

Cecil C-Store with its cache of Petroleum Memorabilia, operated by Teri Westerfeld are what remain of what was once a flourishing Multi-Million Dollar regional business.

Our philosophy; with Service, Customers, Community and Employees uppermost, remain, only on a smaller scale. "Things" come and go, but the satisfaction of a job well done are what made the trip worth the ride.