

Spinrite Yarns

Alive and well, in Listowel - a Canadian mill forges ahead in the free trade era.

By Gordon Kearns

On Saturday, September 26, 1992, some 700 guests turned out for the 40th anniversary celebration of Spinrite Yarns & Dyers Ltd., in the small Ontario town of Listowel. The special occasion marked the founding of Spinrite by the late David D. Hay in 1952.

The Listowel mill site was originally occupied by Perfect Knit Mills Ltd., from 1917 to 1927. The business was then sold to Mercury Mills Ltd. of Hamilton, and the name changed to Maitland Spinning Mills.

David Hay, born and raised on a farm in the area, began working in the mill's dye house in 1925, at the age of 15. He eventually became head dye-master. In the late 1940s, he left Listowel for Toronto to become Canadian Manager for the Geigy Company Inc.

Meanwhile, in the summer of 1952, Maitland Spinning Mills announced they would be closing down their Listowel operation. The land, buildings and equipment were up for sale. On hearing this, Hay resolved to see the mill continue operations in the area. With several friends and associates, he formed a new company, Spinrite Yarns & Dyers Ltd., to keep the business in Listowel. On September 26, 1952, they reopened the mill.

Due to a downturn at that particular time, operations had to be started on a small scale. Initially there were only 15 employees, and the new company was facing enormous odds in the marketplace.

Through David Hay's determination, leadership, and hard work, supported by a dedicated work force, the plant regained its place in the community, and in the Canadian textile industry. Spinrite grew to become a modern, highly efficient

mill, with products sold in Canada, the U.S. and overseas.

When David Hay passed away in 1985, his two sons, Robert and Douglas, took over the management of the company, as President and Executive Vice-President respectively.

Today, Spinrite divides its business into two major product categories: consumer and industry. Consumer products include hand-knitting yarns, crochet yarns and craft yarns, sold directly to retail. Industry products are yarns made expressly for the knitted outerwear industry.

Consumer Yarns

Unfortunately, home-knit sweaters have been losing steadily to the low-cost products now available at retail from computerized knitting machines. Consumption of hand-knitting yarns is estimated to have dropped by over 30% in the past seven or so years, and the market has now reached a plateau.

As the overall demand for consumer knitting products slackened, total yarn production capacity also shrank. Less efficient mills have fallen by the wayside, leaving the remaining yarn market to a reduced number of the stronger producers. Spinrite counts itself among these stronger survivors, and is going for an increasing share of the smaller total pie.

In 1991, Spinrite acquired the Bernat yarn business in the U.S. and Canada. It is an indication of their aggressive, outgoing approach to the consumer yarn business. The well-known Bernat name and established outlets are a considerable advantage in both markets.

Spinrite branded lines now include Bernat, Bouquet, White Buffalo and Spin-Rite. There is also a substantial business done in private brand lines for major retailers. Yarns are offered in 100% acrylic, acrylic/wool blends, and 100% natural fibres, and in knitting worsted, chunky, and baby weights.

Spinrite's consumer yarn business is supported by an extensive program of merchandising, advertising, accessories, and a complete range of knitting pattern books. A knit design studio is maintained in Toronto, headed by Daria McGuire, Creative and Merchandising Director.



Richard Brown, Vice-President of Sales and Marketing, with product displays in the factory outlet store.

Photo courtesy of Gordon Kearns.