

THE CONCRETE CENTURY



THE CONCRETE CENTURY

INSPIRING CONCRETE INNOVATION FOR ONE HUNDRED YEARS!

The phrase, "Inspiring Concrete Innovation," captures the essence of Besser staff and their dedication to the industry that Herman and Jesse Besser envisioned as the building material of the future. The phrase also applies to the creative, entrepreneurial spirit of producers around the globe who rely on Besser ingenuity to bring their product designs into reality!

Since 1904 both Besser Company and the concrete industry have grown and improved. And now, 100 years later, the vision that Jesse and Herman foresaw is even brighter. Institutions and homeowners continue to develop new ways to use concrete products for building construction. The same is true for commercial and industrial users of these economical, durable and aesthetically pleasing materials around the world.

The content of this book portrays a few of the many people and events that contributed to our colorful history. We hope it gives you a flavor of our past, a sense for the innovative nature of Besser employees, and the beginning chapter of the next 100 years.

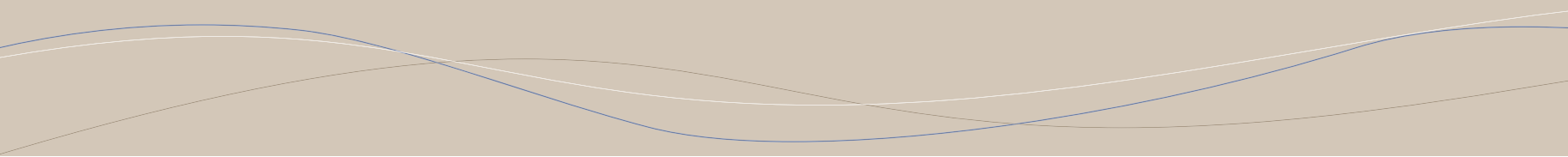
The dedication and expertise of each Besser employee, the trust of customers, the cooperation of suppliers, the tireless efforts of trade associations and the support of our communities have all contributed to the success of Besser Company. Thanks to each and every one of you who have contributed to the success of Besser for these 100 years.



Jim Park
Chairman and CEO



June 2004



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By Otto Stephan; edited by Jennifer Walterreit.

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100 YEARS OF INSPIRING INNOVATION

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The contents of this book are arranged in chronological order wherever possible. However, some events are presented out of sequence if they help explain the topic being discussed.



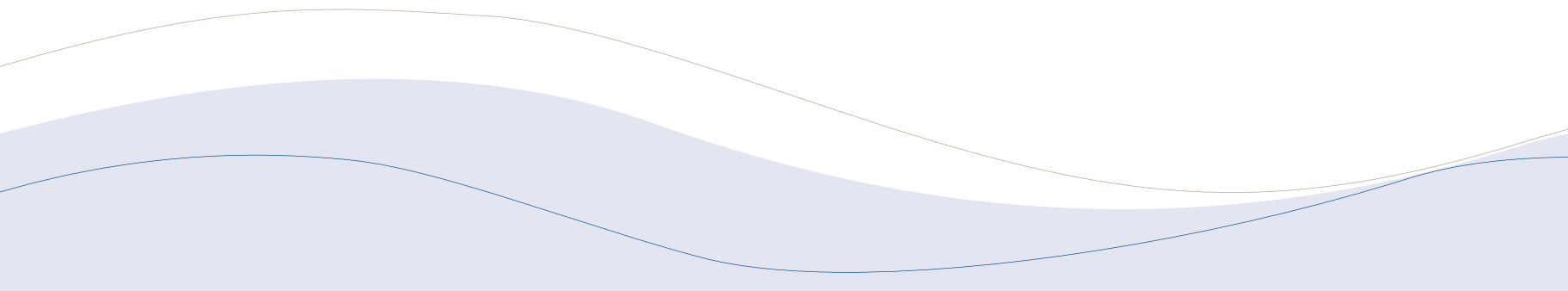
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This 100th Anniversary book is the brainchild of Jim Park, Besser chairman and CEO, who believes that it is important to chronicle, preserve and celebrate Besser history. Jim entrusted Terri Rondeau, director of corporate communications, with the multi-faceted role of project coordinator, and enlisted the help of Besser retiree Otto Stephan to gather the information needed for this book.

Our heartfelt gratitude goes to Otto who painstakingly documented and researched the information captured in this commemorative book. He retired from Besser in 1994 after a rewarding 38-year career in the advertising department where he kept abreast of company activities while successfully completing projects as varied as co-op literature creation, trade show planning, and editing both the company newsletter, *News & Views*, and the company magazine *Besser Block*. Otto has worked diligently over the past several years pulling all the pieces together so that this book could be written on our 100th Anniversary. Throughout one summer, Otto worked with intern Erica Seguin to compile the outline for the book and began researching the facts. Along the way, assistance was also sought from Alpena Community College, The Alpena News and the Jesse Besser Museum.

Every Besser employee over the past 100 years has contributed to the success of the company, although they are not all mentioned by name in this book. The names and circumstances shared in this book represent some of the most significant milestones that shaped Besser Company into the company it is today.

Industrial Image, Inc. of Alpena is responsible for the appearance of this book. Jenni Walterreit edited Otto's manuscript utilizing her insightful copywriting techniques. The creative graphic design talents of Jean Thomas and Eileen Wegmeyer have created this unique layout. Village Press, Inc. of Traverse City, Michigan, who has printed Besser materials since the late 1970s, published the book.



THE CONCRETE CENTURY

FORWARD

In Herman Besser's native German language, "Besser" translates to mean "Better", appropriate because improving machines to make them better was his innovative son Jesse's lifelong passion. It is fitting that Jesse Besser used concrete as a vehicle for his work, because concrete and Besser Company share a common trait: the only limits lie in the constraints of human imagination.

From humble beginnings Besser Company has emerged with a focused vision and a dedication unmatched in the industry. Each product supplied by Besser Company demonstrates ingenuity, flexibility and careful attention to quality. No matter where in the world our employees are based, the goal remains the same: to provide the best systems, services and parts to concrete products producers around the globe.

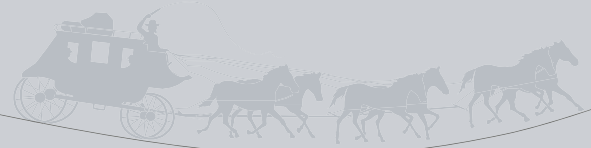
The success of Besser today is built upon the successes of our past. The vision for the future, the persistence for perfection and the innovation for our customers that Jesse Besser brought to the table years ago remain a vital part of the Besser culture today.



Herman Besser



Jesse H. Besser



CHAPTER ONE: ***In the Beginning***

We open the story of Besser Company
with the birth of Herman Besser in
Germany on the first day of October
1853. A few years later, young
Herman and his family crossed
the ocean to Buffalo, New
York, and joined thousands of
other people in search of the
“American Dream.”
Herman found a wife, and
he and Hattie Ely were
married. She gave birth
to their first son,
Jesse Herman Besser,
on 21 May 1882.





*Herman,
Hattie and Jesse.*

Herman's dream of America was to work under the towering pines and oaks that blanketed the upper Midwest, as the trees in the eastern states had already been significantly thinned. Hearing a great deal about the booming lumber industry in northern Michigan, he made several trips to the area to investigate. He also was hoping to farm, and upon discovering that both farming and lumbering were viable in Michigan, the decision was made.

Herman returned to Buffalo and promptly bought a team of horses as well as logging and farming equipment. All this was shipped to Gaylord, Michigan via Michigan

Central Railroad, and

Herman decided to travel with it. Hattie followed a short time later by passenger train with baby Jesse and from Gaylord the family traveled to Hillman by horse and wagon. They lived with friends while Herman found and purchased 240 acres of land four miles south of Hillman in Rust Township, Montmorency County. The property had been owned by Charlie Richardson, who was also the owner of the Ninth Street Dam in Alpena.



Hillman farm in Rust Township.



Log jam on Thunder Bay River in the 1880s.

Never satisfied with the operation of commercial machines, Herman worked constantly to develop new hunting traps. He would soon discover this inventive trait was one his son Jesse inherited.

The forests in those days were vast beyond what one might comprehend today. On his first day in the woods, the trees were so thick that Herman had to take his wagon apart in order to turn it around. However, with determination, Herman quickly cleared an area and built



Logging days on the Thunder Bay River.

a small frame house. By the time Hattie and Jesse moved in, Herman was already busy clearing the forest for farmland, using a Hawkeye Grub and Stump Machine from Illinois to help speed the work. As soon as he was old enough to do so, Jesse jumped in and helped clear the fields.

In the 1800s “timber cruisers” were raking in big profits, surveying stands of timber to estimate the number of board feet. Herman discovered he had quite a talent for this work, so after he planted crops, he went to work in the woods as a professional timber cruiser. His amazingly accurate estimates made it possible for him to bid low enough to win a deal, yet high enough to yield handsome profits—both for himself and for the property owner. After he won a bid, he’d hire lumberjacks to chop down the trees, cut and trim them into logs, then float them down the Thunder Bay River, to the Alpena sawmills at the mouth of the river.

Fur trapping was another popular industry in the northern states during this time period. Pelts that sailed down Lake Huron from northern Michigan to warehouses in Detroit, Michigan, were processed in Montreal, Canada and New York and then were shipped to Europe. Herman spent many winters (including his last on earth) trapping otter, beaver and muskrat, which were plentiful in along the Thunder Bay River. Never satisfied with the operation of commercial machines, Herman worked constantly to develop new hunting traps. He would soon discover this inventive trait was one his son Jesse inherited.



Remember “before buying a wheel that the Alpena is a high grade bicycle. Manufactured and guaranteed by LEWIS & BROAD OF THE ALPENA BICYCLE WORKS.” Call and get prices.

C.V. HICKS—BICYCLES

New guaranteed bicycles at twenty-five dollars, a full season's guarantee.

STEELE & COLLINS

—ADVERTISEMENT FROM
1901, THE ALPENA NEWS



Jesse, Hermione and Walter Besser.

In the meantime, the Besser family was growing. Hattie gave birth to Walter on 8 March 1887. Five years later, on 14 May 1892, Hermione was born. By that time, Jesse was old enough for school. Herman cut a path through the forest to Niergarth School, a one-room log cabin three-fourths of a mile from his house. On his first day of school, Hattie walked with him to be sure he knew the way, and after that it was up to Jesse. The schoolroom had a stove in the center, a water bucket and dipper in a corner and a pump out in the yard. A good

pupil, Jesse wrote a composition on 19 December 1891 in which he declared, "It is five days before Christmas...And I wonder what I will get. Last year I got a drawing slate, a mouthorgan and some marbles. I do not think there will be very good sleighing on Christmas, unless it snows some more."

From early on, Jesse had the responsibility of regular chores, including bringing the cow home, doing the milking, feeding the horses and cutting and piling stove wood. When he grew old enough to have a bicycle, his father relied on him to run errands and carry messages to the farmers up and down the country roads. Jesse had the second bike in the county; the first belonged to the postman. And when his father was out in the woods for weeks at a time, Jesse was also responsible for keeping the books for the farm and running the household (with his mother in the background, of course). It is remarkable to compare this ten-year-old Jesse Besser to ten-year-olds today!



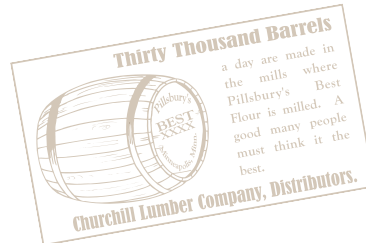
Herman in front of the Besser-Churchill Company.



The old Besser-Churchill Company where Jesse Besser first worked, located on the banks of the Thunder Bay River.

THE MOVE TO ALPENA

In 1890, twelve lumber mills and five shingle mills were operating in Alpena. But by 1893, the Alberta Pack Mill bought its first raft of logs from the Georgian Bay region as lumber had begun to thin in Michigan. Three years later, the timber business had declined to less than half of just a few years prior. Herman realized his timber cruising days were coming to an end and decided to embark on a new career. In 1897, Herman established the Besser-Churchill Company. This sawmill was located on the banks of the Thunder Bay River where Van Lare Hall of Alpena Community College now stands. The mill manufactured wooden shingles and three types of barrel staves: nail keg, large barrel for holding sugar or flour and tight cooperage for holding liquids. With the success of the sawmill, Herman sold



the Hillman farm in January 1898 and moved his family thirty miles east to Alpena. Jesse wrote in his diary dated 13 February 1898: "We moved down here, to Alpena, on the third day of January 1898, having sold the farm in Hillman to Joseph Kurtz. I started at the Central School on 17 January in the eighth grade."



Jesse H. Besser at age 15.



The first boy he met was Fred Trelfa and they immediately sparked a friendship that would last the rest of their lives.



Central High School.

with concrete and it served as Alpena High School and subsequently Thunder Bay Junior High before being torn down in 1999.

In September 1898, sixteen-year-old Jesse enrolled in the ninth grade Latin Section at Central High, right across the street from his house. The first boy he met was Fred Trelfa and they immediately sparked a friendship that would last the rest of their lives. That November, under the supervision of school librarian Emily Oliver, Jesse and four classmates

The Besser family lived in a simple frame house on the corner of White Street and Second Avenue, directly across from Central High School. Incidentally, that school, built in 1891, burned to the ground in 1940. The city then rebuilt the building

organized a school-wide debate team. Jesse served as president and modeled the sessions after the United States House of Representatives. The club was so successful that apparently it made the older classes jealous. In fact, Jesse recalled an envious upperclassman remarking, “The freshmen are always trying to run things around here.” Little did they know that the leadership and innovation of that freshman would someday expand beyond the school walls and resuscitate a dying town.

Jesse easily managed not only his high school load which included his duties as class treasurer, but also courses at Alpena Business College in downtown Alpena. At home Jesse helped his parents with chores around the house in addition to working in his father’s sawmill. It was at this early stage of his life that Jesse



View of the Ninth Street Dam. The Besser mill is in the center of the background with three smoke stacks.

learned from his parents the basic values that would shape his life. Integrity, honesty and fair treatment of people became a part of his being. He learned in the marketplace that quality equipment is essential and that the end products manufactured should be economical to produce, durable and aesthetically pleasing.

As if that weren't enough, Jesse also attended numerous special events around town. Jesse sat in on lectures at the Opera House on Chisholm Street, commencement activities for the 1898 graduating class, and the farewell reception for Captain Will Prince and his company of Michigan National Guard being sent off to the Spanish-American War. He writes in his journal dated 21 April 1898: "War commenced between the U.S. and Spain. When the news reached here, cannons began to boom, bells to ring, people to shout, flags to appear, and Alpena seemed able to lick Spain alone just now."

ALPENA PORTLAND CEMENT

In 1899, Andrew Carnegie monopolized the steel industry and the gold rush had pushed north to Alaska's shoreline, yielding the richest tidewater diggings ever found. American industries eagerly tapped into the abundant array of natural resources—steel, coal, gold and other minerals — the supply of which appeared unlimited. As these other industries burgeoned, they further diminished the lumber demand.

Herman and Jesse were taking note of the changing times. The logging industry had been thriving, such that by 1889 the volume soared to almost 220 million board feet a year. But by the late 1890s exports had dropped by half and continued to plummet. The local forests,

once filled with virgin pine, oak and cedar, were exhausted from over-harvesting, so the Alpena mills had to process trees shipped from Canada to keep operating. Faced with the demise of a town built upon the failing fur and lumber industries, Herman Besser teamed up with Alpena's great lumber barons Frank W. Fletcher, William B. Comstock, George J. Robinson, William H. Monaghan and Michael O'Brian to capitalize on another great natural resource of the area: limestone. On 3 August 1899 the Alpena Portland Cement Company was organized for, "Mining, manufacturing and dealing in Portland cement and other kindred mineral products." Capital stock was set at \$300,000 with 30,000 shares at a par value of \$10 each.

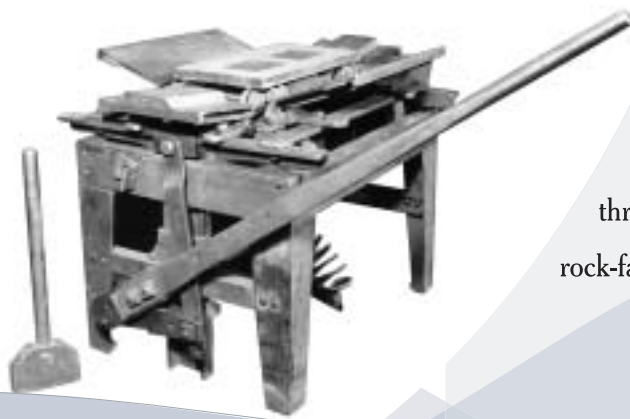
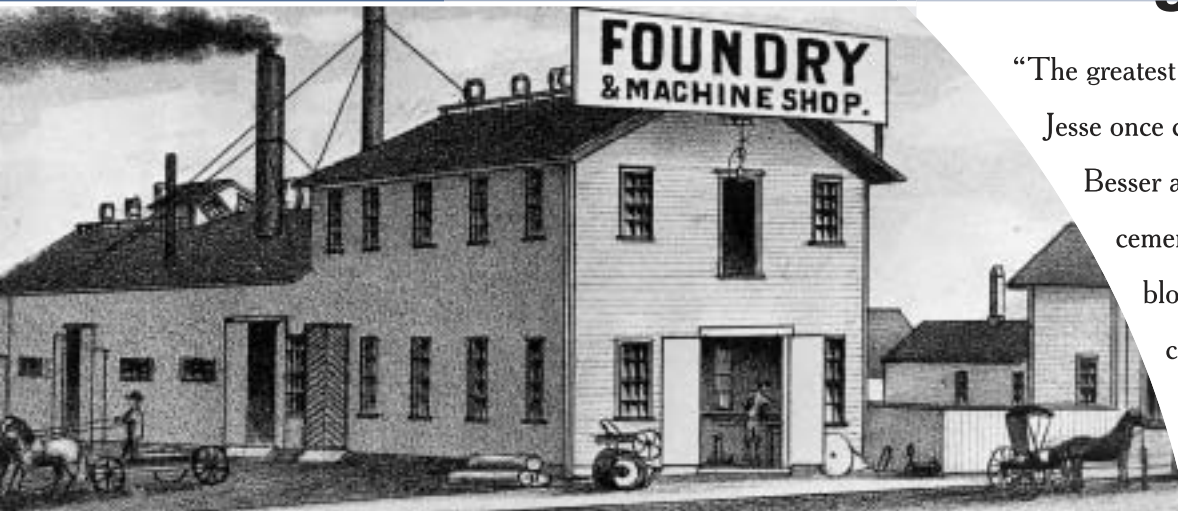
Located just behind the present Lafarge Corporation site, construction of the plant began in the fall of 1899 and the manufacturing of cement followed in 1902.



***Postcard featuring the Huron
Portland Cement Company.***



CHAPTER TWO: **Besser Manufacturing Company is Born**



“The greatest thing Alpena Portland Cement did,” Jesse once commented, “was to give Herman Besser and his son Jesse the idea of using cement for the manufacture of concrete block.” Herman and Jesse purchased a crude blockmaking machine in 1902 to produce block for local construction. Unhappy with the machine’s performance, they worked diligently to redesign it over the next two years. In 1904, Herman and Jesse unveiled a much improved hand-tamp block machine, capable of producing 200 block per 10-hour-day, equipped with vertical cores and collapsible sides for block removal. This marked the birth of the new block machinery industry. The first block were 12 x 8 x 24 inches, with two cores and faced on all four sides. Many older homes in Alpena and throughout the Midwest still have the original rock-face Besser block foundations.



THE HAND TAMP BLOCK MACHINE

Though he had worked to improve the original machine, Jesse immediately discovered two main problems with the newer hand tamp machine. First, the blockmaking procedure was backbreaking labor. Three strong men working a 10-hour-day could make just 200 block. Second, each block required an individual cored pallet, which could not be reused until the block had cured. These pallets were expensive and limited the machine's output. But even with those weak points Herman and Jesse knew it was a substantial improvement from the original machine. So Jesse's challenge was another level of improvement to the machine, something that would remain a passion his entire life even as the machines became more and more advanced.

Local cement demands indicated a large market for concrete products and likewise a market for a block machine. In 1904, they also purchased the Charles B. Warren Foundry and Machine Shop on the corner of Merchant and Oldfield Streets to serve their dual need for both iron and manufacturing space. Besser Manufacturing Company was born.

The first machine was sold to John Nagy Sr. of Columbia Concrete Products in Toledo, Ohio. Each machine sold was shipped by railroad and Jesse personally visited the plant and taught the workers how to operate it.



Besser drying shed and mill, 10 March 1903.

Soon Herman and Jesse hired their first full-time employee, Chester C. Keegan, in 1904. He worked as a machinist and after just one year with Besser, Chester moved to Bay City, Michigan where he earned a degree in engineering and afterward took a job in the automotive industry.



ANNA MILLER MULVENA

Though busier than ever before, between school and work Jesse somehow found time for a personal life. On 30 August 1906, he married Anna Miller Mulvena in her parents' home at 232 S. First Avenue, the same site where the couple would build a complete concrete masonry home in 1938. Anna was the same age as Jesse, born 19 September 1882, to parents David and Martha Mulvena of Alpena. Soft-spoken and plain, she was a perfect companion for Jesse.

Anna's family took great interest in the concrete block machine manufacturing business and this pleased Jesse to the extent that when it came time to announce a successor for his company and life-long dream, he chose her nephew, Philip Mulvena Park, son of Anna's sister Mae and Charles T. Park. Anna's older sister, Elizabeth Mulvena Rogers, was close to Anna and Jesse as well. In fact, Elizabeth lived on the second floor of the Besser house on First Avenue and would also accompany Anna and Jesse on trips. This arrangement worked out nicely as Jesse was so intensely involved in his business he tended to neglect his wife, which allowed Elizabeth to provide company for Anna in that big house on First Street.

Anna was the same age as Jesse, born 19 September 1882, to parents David and Martha Mulvena of Alpena. Soft-spoken and plain, she was a perfect companion for Jesse.

Anna M. Besser



Jesse H. Besser

ALPENA PORTLAND CEMENT CLOSES ITS DOORS

By 1907, Besser Manufacturing Company had grown to employ 20 full-time people. Jesse devoted himself to the continual development of the concrete block machine, while Herman was still highly involved with the Alpena Portland Cement Company, having been just that year elected president.

However, it was also in 1907 that Huron Portland Cement, which had been in operation since 1901, began cement production. The competition suffocated Alpena Portland Cement and forced it to close in 1909. Huron Portland

What's the Difference Between Concrete and Cement?

Some people may think these two terms describe the same thing, but they do not. Concrete is a mixture in which cement is an important ingredient. Concrete is composed of air, cement, gravel or crushed stone, sand and water. It starts as a fine gray powder and turns into paste when water is added. When this paste dries, it's hard as a rock. Adding sand and stone give it more durability and density. Portland cement is a general term for the generic type of cement used in 95% of all concrete (in the same way that sterling is a type of silver). Many people make the comparison to flour and bread; flour is the cement and concrete is the bread.

Cement soon became the largest cement producer in the world and by 1910 was producing over 900,000 barrels of cement a year with six kilns. Lafarge Corporation purchased the successor company of Huron Portland Cement in 1986 and continues to operate in Alpena.

THE MODERNIZED HAND TAMP

When Alpena Portland Cement Company closed, Herman focused his attention entirely on Besser Manufacturing Company. He managed the office affairs as president of the company while Jesse served as head engineer and salesman, developing the machine and promoting it to potential customers. Jesse released a modernized simple hand tamp machine and system to make block in 1909. It boasted a self-discharging concrete mixer, a skip loader to deliver the material into the mixer and power tamping of the molds. Production reached 600 block per ten-hour day, and block size was reduced to 8 x 8 x 16 inches with three cores. Now the block was easier to produce, the smaller size required less manpower and since it was modular, the design of buildings was made simpler.

Besser Manufacturing Company purchased the bankrupt Alpena Motor Car Company building on Johnson Street for \$5200 in 1913.

Alpena Motor Car Company was renowned for producing the Alpena Flyer. Approximately 1000 cars were produced in the company's history and most were sold in Buffalo, New York and St. Paul, Minnesota. Though Besser Company never manufactured cars, this building was



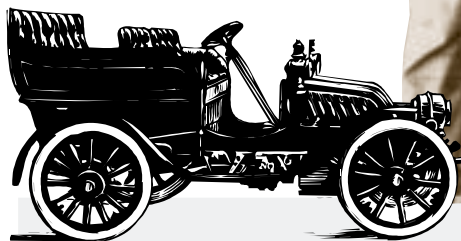
A worker inside the Alpena Flyer machine shop.

considered one of the soundest structures in Alpena at the time and was an excellent investment property.

It still remains part of Besser Company World Headquarters, currently housing the engineering and manufacturing offices following extensive remodeling in 1987.

AUTOMATIC FACE-DOWN MACHINE

Jesse was known for working all day and into the evening on his beloved block machine designs. In fact, Jesse was renowned in Alpena for his unusual approach to learning machinery. For instance, the owner of the former Froggett Jewelry in Alpena, Sam Froggett, relates that



**"Alpena Flyer 1911 Models:
Standard Touring, 4 or 5 passenger,
body optional. . .**

**. . . The Greatest, Biggest and most
sensational actual values in the automobile
world for \$1450. . .**

. . . It is cheaper than a horse at any time."

many times Jesse would wander into their shop. He'd then sit and watch the clocks with open housings for as long as six hours at a stretch, learning how the gears interacted. Thanks to this kind of diligence, Jesse continued to improve the machine and the Automatic Face-Down Machine was unveiled in 1914. This model produced 1800 block per ten-hour day, and though it still produced block one at a time, it incorporated various design changes that made it easier to operate. As a self-taught engineer, Jesse sincerely believed in basic mechanics. One of these, the cam and lever, became his vision for block machinery. Competitive companies were producing hydraulic versions that operated more quietly than the Besser mechanical model, but Jesse stuck by his guns. He knew that some customers preferred the less noisy machine, but he firmly believed that the mechanical version was more durable and offered more precise machine movement resulting in higher quality units ... and was made to far outlast competitive models.

AUTOMATIC PLAIN PALLET STRIPPER

Still unfettered by the pressure to change to hydraulics, Besser introduced the Automatic Plain Pallet Stripper in 1924. This was significant—the most important development thus far, in fact—because it addressed one of the main weaknesses Jesse had found with the original machine: the need for a separate pallet for each machine. The Automatic Plain Pallet Stripper utilized a plain piece of steel instead of a cored pallet for each shape and size of block. This coreless pallet greatly reduced the inventory of steel pallets required to produce the product and the idle time of waiting for pallets to become available. Customers were demanding a machine that could produce block of various shapes and sizes, all of which could be produced on a plain pallet using a suspended mold. Besser met the challenge with the added bonus

In April 1925, Herman Besser was granted U.S. patent number 1,534,353 for fractured block and method of making the same. The patent also addresses the method to split the cured unit—a splitter.



of eliminating another process: manually inserting a different cored pallet for each block. Instead, the pallet was raised to meet the mold, the block was formed, and the stripper head pushed the product through the mold and the block was ejected. Block production reached 3000 per ten-hour day and in effect remained the standard in the industry for the next ten years.

FAMILY PASSINGS

Jesse's sister Hermione died in August 1921 after a brief illness, which was a tough blow for Jesse. Then, in the spring of 1926, an event marked a somber ending and a new beginning for Besser Company.

Herman Besser passed away on 12 March at age 73. Jesse and his father had worked side by side for years and Herman had contributed much to the business during his productive lifetime. He had been a partner with Jesse in several equipment achievements: the Hand Tamp, the

Skip Loader, the Self Discharging Mixer, Power Tamping and the Automatic Plain Pallet Stripper. With his father's



Hattie, Hermione and Herman Besser.



Besser Company 1929 engineering staff. Jesse is the second from the left.

death, Jesse took full control of Besser Manufacturing Company, a position he was both capable and ready to perform. Anna stepped up to join him in leading management at Besser Company, personally managing and distributing payroll, handling all incoming and outgoing mail and secretarial responsibilities.

EXPANDING

Word began to spread throughout the country regarding Besser machines. Demand finally rose to the point where Jesse needed to hire more people. A good judge of character,

he would personally interview and hire each employee. His first priority was to enhance the engineering department, and he did so with Fred Scheffler, brothers Elroy and Erwin Bobolts and Lorne Brooks. Elroy Bobolts was later promoted to vice president of engineering. He had worked in sales and was a lead figure in obtaining Army & Navy contracts during World War II. Erwin left engineering for the shop, where he worked as foreman until his retirement.

Jesse craved to return to his main passion: working, tweaking, improving and upgrading the block machine. He'd become so busy traveling and promoting equipment he didn't have time to do what he enjoyed most. So he began to hire salesmen around the country. They'd sell on a commission basis until earning Jesse's confidence and then he would put them on the payroll.

ABOUT JESSE BESSER

A tall, lean man, Jesse Besser cut an intimidating figure, standing six-four in his simple clean suits. An expert in efficiency, he expected the same in others. Naturally curious, he would challenge and question minute details. That imposing stature and inner drive for perfection was compensated by a quiet and patient nature; Jesse spoke little but when he did, it was always with sincerity. Meeting him, it was easy to guess that among his core values were patience and perseverance, perhaps sprung from the deep faith he and Anna shared. His personal Bible was pencil-marked with favorite passages by which the couple clearly lived. The inside front cover of most books in his

personal library were penciled with notations on topics of particular interest, referencing the page number where information could be found.

Never moved to anger, Jess (as he was called by his friends and fellow Rotarians) approached the difficulties in life with calmness.

The Bessers were famous teetotalers. At company gatherings, if alcohol was served it was promptly hidden when the announcement came that Mr. Besser had arrived. On one interesting afternoon, he received a case of scotch whiskey as a gift to the company. Ardently opposed to liquor, Jesse asked Ray Bailey to have the yard crew take it to the city disposal area and destroy the entire case. Ray was a staff member who started in engineering and soon moved up to vice president of purchasing and played many key functions



The 1937 engineering staff, Jesse is seated at the desk on the far right.

Rum Runners Use Machine Guns on River Dry Agents

DETROIT, June 1—(UP) Detroit River rum runners are resorting for the first time to machine guns for doing battle with dry agents.

Two officers have reported to Carey D. Ferguson, collector of customs, that two runners sprayed the wake around their boat with machine gun bullets when they tried to overtake the liquor craft. Agents emptied their pistols at the fleeing runners who escaped into Canadian waters. Before enactment of the Jones law there was no shooting on the river. There have been three the last month.

—1927, NEWS REPORT FROM
THE ALPENA NEWS

in company growth. He also became a close and loyal friend to Jesse and Anna. Ray also was called upon to play many roles, not all of them traditional—as was the case when he ensured each and every whiskey bottle was emptied onto the ground—much to the dismay of thirsty onlookers!

Clearly Jesse was passionate about his beliefs, whether they concerned alcohol, charities or—of course—Besser machinery. Especially with his block machinery, he was a perfectionist, concerned with every single detail. Jesse created a secret development area in the middle of the shop floor specifically devoted to inventing a six-at-a-time block machine. Helping him was a full-time shop worker, three engineers and two draftsmen.

As with many great minds, Jesse used unorthodox methods to



Besser early advertising literature

generate ideas. Often he would call an employee into his office five minutes before the end of the workday. He would ask the employee to come in and sit with him. He would look out the window and observe, “Well, say now, the smoke coming from the stacks on the high school is blowing due south over my house.” That’s all he would say, and then they would sit—often in total silence—for up to an hour. When enough time had passed in his opinion, Jesse would look at his watch and announce, “Well, say now, the women are probably waiting supper for us. Guess that it’s time to leave.”

At first the workers found it strange and confusing to sit through the awkward silence with no explanation. But after a few of these meetings they came to realize he was inviting an opportunity to brainstorm about ways to improve the block machine, sell additional parts or promote the business in general. Jesse was open to all opinions, patiently coaxing their thoughts as a trusted listener.

The story is told of the several hours he spent watching an IBM card sorter drop key punched cards into pockets; his objective

was to see if there was a similar convenient way to move the pallets through a block machine.

Even though the Plain Pallet Stripper was a huge success and satisfied customers continued to give terrific feedback regarding the abilities of the new machine, Jesse was convinced he could find improvements.

SYNCHRONIZATION WITH A CAMSHAFT

In 1929 he removed the standard “tamper dogs” (which held up the tampers when they were not in use) and replaced them with cams. The tampers were raised and dropped by cams operated by the same camshaft that controlled the other movements of the machine. A single gear-driven cam assured accurate, timed and automatic operation of everything: the pallet feeding, feeding the concrete, start and stop of the tamping (and later, vibration), striking off excess concrete, stripping the units through the mold, and delivering finished units to the front of the machine for easy off-bearing. The synchronization of all the parts keying from the movement of the cam eliminated many errors, and this base design concept is still utilized in many of the machines today.

***“Better to Own a Besser
than Compete with One.”***

—Besser Company advertising tag line

THE GREAT DEPRESSION

In 1924, the Federal Reserve Bank created over \$500 million in new currency to boost business growth. Other fiscal policies generated \$4 billion that banks eagerly loaned to prospective entrepreneurs. Heavy stock earnings and dividends on Wall Street set the market at an all-time high. On 4 September 1929 the Dow Jones Industrial peaked at 381 points. These soaring prices were the trend in what had become a strong bull market, one that investors and economists expected to rise infinitely. Yale University economist Irving Fisher proclaimed, "The nation is marching along a permanently high plateau of prosperity."

But by 3 October 1929, America teetered at the edge of that plateau. The Dow Jones began to drop, and by day's end on 29 October, it closed at 230 points. Between 29 October and 13 November, stock prices hit their lowest marks on record and \$30 billion disappeared from the American economy. This was the dark beginning of the Great Depression, that monumental decade that lasted ten years, closed 86,000 businesses and left 25 percent of the American work force unemployed. At Besser Company days were challenging, with payless paydays. Jesse went on the road to make collections ... and in 1929 travel was excruciatingly slow and difficult. A trip from Alpena to Detroit took a full day by motorcar, and from there one had to catch a train to Cleveland, Chicago, Pittsburgh or further to collect from customers. Yet Besser Company survived.

PHILLIP MULVENA PARK

It was in 1933 — in the throes of the Great Depression — that Phillip Mulvena Park, nephew to Jesse and Anna, went to work at Besser Company as a mechanic. Born in Alpena on 23 March 1910 to Charles T. and Mae (Mulvena) Park, he received his early education at Alpena Public Schools, and graduated from Detroit

Northwestern High School in 1927. After graduation he attended Wayne State University. He was employed as vice president of Consolidated Machinery Corp., manufacturers of concrete block machinery located in Adrian, Michigan in 1930. That same year Besser purchased the company. He then attended Olivet College in Olivet, Michigan, graduating in 1932 with a Bachelor of Arts in Business. He played basketball and football while attending Olivet, which was part of the Michigan Intercollegiate Athletic Association, and in 1931 received recognition as the league's outstanding tackle. Following his graduation from college, he played professional basketball for the Kellogg Company in the 1932-1933 season while employed with Vandevoot Sporting Goods Supply.

The first challenge for Phil Park at Besser was

The shipment was arranged by the Besser salesman in Wisconsin, J. Wesley Craighead, one of several Besser staff members inducted in the Alpena Area Sports Hall of Fame (his plaque is seen at right).



Phil Park at eight months old.

dealing with tough guy Erwin “The Bull” Bobolts. The two locked horns often; more than once Phil steamed out the back door to sit on the railroad tracks and cool off. Another challenge was his job of pouring metal at the foundry. Scalding hot metal in one’s work boots is surely not a delightful situation but one he unfortunately encountered fairly often—so he quickly learned to get those boots off fast!

Those scenarios aside, he truly did enjoy the business, and with Jesse guiding him, he quickly learned the ropes. After several visits to Canada he developed a special interest in international markets. Phil made the first international sale for Besser Company to Eugenio Mendoza in Caracas, Venezuela in 1937. The machine, a K-12 tamper, was shipped by truck to Puerto Cabello to build 300 low-cost houses for Dictator Gorney. In 1938, Phil took his one-year-old son, Jim, to Latin America with him, foreshadowing the life Jim would lead. Phil was steadily promoted, as he moved from his initial job of mechanic to sales representative, eventually to personnel director, and to export manager at the time of the Venezuela sale. He became vice president of Besser Company in 1946.

Two people significant to the early development of Besser Company were Mel Cruzen and Don McVicar. Mel was hired in early 1936 to work nights on the drill press, and two years later Jesse appointed him to manage the Venezuelan block plant started by Phil. With Mel at the helm, the plant produced enough block to build 500 homes in the area.

It was about this time in 1937 that Don McVicar, freshly graduated from Alpena High School, took a job with Besser Company as a materials handler in the shop. His starting pay was 20 cents an hour, working ten-hour

days, six days a week ... in those days a \$12-a-week check was typical. After three months in the shop, Jesse transferred Don to the accounting office. Don handled accounts receivable and shipping bills for the company and learned typing skills from the secretaries in the steno pool. The first to arrive in the morning and the last to leave at night, Don swept the floors and lit the pot-bellied stove that was the only source of heat for the office. Employees supplied their own coal. After serving in the armed services from 1941 to 1946, Don returned to Besser. He joined the overseas sales force, and later was promoted to export manager, replacing a senior salesman, Ralph Bailey. After having shown good success, Ralph moved to California to open a district office and warehouse facilities.



In 1939 Jesse and Anna contracted Floyd Gagnon to build a concrete masonry home at 232 S. First Avenue in Alpena, a lot owned by Anna’s parents. The quality of aggregate in the immediate Alpena area didn’t meet the requirements for a new home, so a custom pinkish colored block was made with special aggregate material shipped from Wisconsin.

THE V3M: VIBRATION UNDER PRESSURE

By 1934, the Unitized Plain Pallet Stripper was producing a fully pressed block with a highly finished face. The machine was entirely transformed from the first hand-tamper, which produced only stone-faced block. Yet, perhaps the most important change came in 1939 when Besser introduced *vibration under pressure* to compact the concrete in the mold.

Vibration was a revolutionary idea. In the past, it was difficult, if not impossible, to remove all air pockets from the concrete mix. Large hammer-like tampers were formerly used to pound the air bubbles out of the concrete in the mold. The new machine, called the V3M, was capable of producing three 8 x 8 x 16 inch block at a time, increasing production to 5000 per 10-hour day as well as facilitating the fast and efficient production of pilaster block, chimney block and floor filler block. The first V3M was sold to Peturzo's in Baltimore, Maryland. The second and third went to companies in Cincinnati, Ohio and Omaha, Nebraska.



Besser Company, 1932, in the former Alpena Flyer building.

THE WAR YEARS

Besser acquired war contracts in July 1941, with the help of Elroy Bobolts as chief negotiator. This contract also landed Elroy the position of vice president of Besser Manufacturing Company. Following the bombing of Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941, the United States joined the Allied

All employees were required to wear photo I.D. tags and had to pass by security guard stations at all entrances of the fenced-in areas. A flier produced by Besser called the "Victory News" kept employees up-to-date on war efforts.



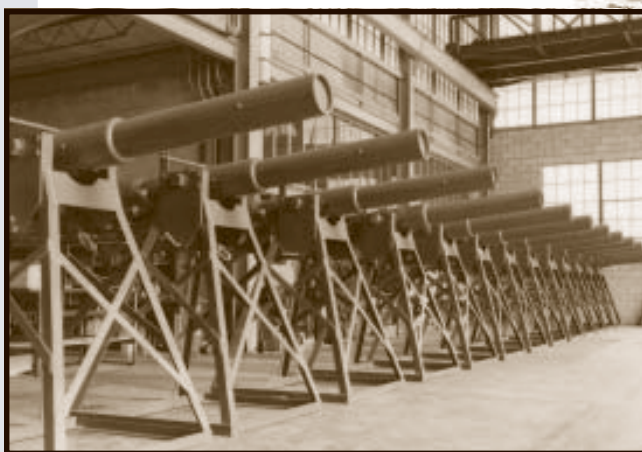
Issued during WWII.



Issued during the Korean Conflict.

Forces in World War II. The war was credited with ending the decade-long Depression because government spending skyrocketed and most employable men were drafted into the armed forces. The United States was seemingly unprepared for the abrupt entrance into the war and consequently had few resources to manufacture weapons and war materials. The government turned to privately owned companies with the means for such production. Besser Manufacturing Company was one of the few capable plants, among scores of applicants, who vied for and won war contracts. Besser immediately recognized this opportunity to increase local employment and rebound from depression losses.

In order to accommodate the war contracts, 80 percent of the Besser shop area was devoted to producing parts for the Navy, such as 50-caliber naval guns, army guns and steam, gas and electric wrenches. Luckily, a foundry had been built at the plant in 1940,



Guns manufactured by Besser Company during WWII.

Besser Company employees working on the breech mount for 3" naval deck gun built during WWII.



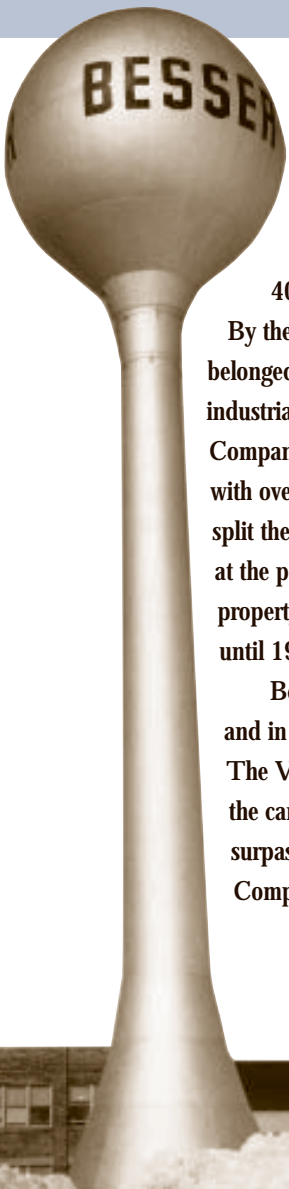
and the coke-fired furnaces were perfectly suited to producing war parts.

Those years were interesting times. Jesse personally interviewed employees for the war department to ensure honest workers. A barbed wire fence was erected that surrounded the entire property. All workers were required to wear photo I.D. tags and had to pass by security guards stations at all entrances of the fenced in areas. A flier produced by Besser called the "Victory News" kept employees up-to-date on war efforts. From 1943 to 1945, during World War II, Phil Park was a lieutenant in the U.S. Navy Reserve. Initially assigned to the purchasing division of the Bureau of Ships of the U. S. Department of the Navy in Washington, D. C., he was later an air combat intelligence officer in the Pacific Theater of Operations before returning to Washington, where he became an assistant to Senator Hugh Scott in 1945. Concurrently, he was attached to the office of the secretary of the Navy.

World War II Rationing Stamps

When the war began, the U.S. Government wanted to save the best, most important products for the "boys" (servicemen overseas). To do this, local rationing boards were set up all over the nation to limit what the civilian population could buy. The first item to be rationed was rubber in December 1941. Other products rationed included tires, gasoline, certain canned goods, meat, butter and fats, sugar, dried foods, shoes and coffee.





UNITED CONSTRUCTION WORKERS LOCAL 404 UNION

The post-depression success of Besser Manufacturing Company attracted the attention of more than just customers and local citizens. In 1942, the United Construction Workers Local 404 Union formed in the shop. All hourly employees were members.

By the end of World War II, more than 12 million American workers belonged to unions, and collective bargaining had taken hold throughout the industrial economy. In August of that year, the Besser Manufacturing Company and the City of Alpena joined forces to construct a water main with over 2000 feet of pipe near Alpena's north side. Besser and the City split the cost, as part of a deal that required Besser to increase fire protection at the plant. Later that year, a water tower was erected on Besser Company property to further increase fire protection. The tower stood as a landmark until 1994 when it was removed.

Besser engineers continued to make improvements to the machine, and in 1944 increased block production to 6000 block per ten-hour-day. The V3M set the standard for what block producers demanded. Pairing the cam-controlled tampers with vibration created a machine that far surpassed competitive hydraulic machines. Besser Manufacturing Company remained in position as the world leader in concrete machinery.

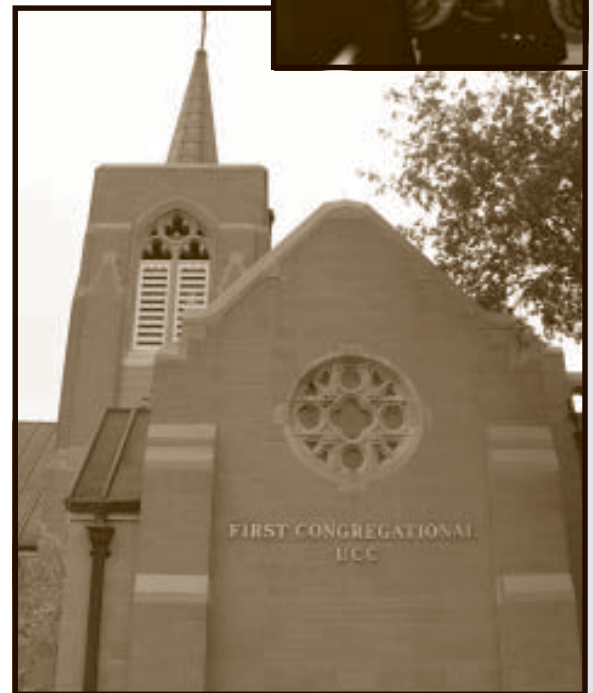
*The Besser
Manufacturing
Company water
sphere stood over 130
ft. tall and held
100,000 gallons.*

***In August of 1942, the
Besser Manufacturing Company and
the City of Alpena joined forces to construct
a water main with over 2000 feet of pipe near
Alpena's north side.***

BESSER FOUNDATION

Jesse and Anna decided it was time to truly give back to their community. After 40 years of sacrifices and sweat, Besser Manufacturing Company was an established, prosperous company. The couple was ready to share their wealth, so the Besser Foundation was

*Jesse and Anna at the
First Congregational
Church of Alpena.*



The First Congregational Church of Alpena as it looks today.

created in 1944, "To receive and administer funds for scientific, educational, religious and charitable purposes, for all the public welfare." The first Board of Trustees consisted of Jesse Besser, Anna Besser and Frederick C. Burnett, a trusted administrative employee of the company.

Besser Manufacturing Company was growing rapidly in both size and experience. It did not take long for Alpena residents to acclaim Besser Manufacturing Company as the premier employer in the area. One of the many faithful employees to enjoy their tenure with Besser was Shirley Johnson. Shirley came to work for Besser on 4 September 1945. "I started the day after Labor Day, and they paid me for the holiday, so I figured it was a pretty good place to work." During her career, Shirley was secretary to Jesse, remaining on as secretary to Jim Arbuckle, chief financial officer, after the deaths of both Anna and Jesse. Shirley retired in February 2001 after over 55 years of service.



Celebration in the Besser plant accepting the Army/Navy "E" award in 1945.

*Army/Navy
Pennant*

ARMY/NAVY "E" AWARD

Besser Company was bestowed the prestigious and rare Army/Navy "E" award on 9 October 1945. The award was given to only 5 percent of the industries engaged in war work in order to serve as an expression of appreciation from the military for a job well done.

World War II may have been over, but a new one was brewing inside the company. On 19 July 1946, 400 employees went on strike at Besser Company. The strike commenced widespread hostilities among plant employees and management. In order to curtail the violence, liquor sales were suspended in Alpena for nearly one week.



NATIONAL CONCRETE MASONRY ASSOCIATION (NCMA)

The National Industry Convention was formed in 1905 “to improve the quality of concrete block.” This group didn’t survive but partly as a means to retrieve some of the 1930s depression conditions and partly to develop “fair competition,” the Concrete Masonry Association was formed in 1933. Ben Wilk, a code authority on block, was named president. This group also disappeared, but in November 1942, at a meeting in Detroit, Gene Olson of Stearns, Adrian, Michigan and Jesse Besser each pledged \$10,000 for a new budget and volunteered the use of their advertising managers to reformulate the trade association. The trade association office opened in Chicago in January 1943.

M.E. ‘Doc’ Rinker happened to be the chair in 1954 when the Alpena community recognized the 50th Anniversary of Besser Company as well as the 72nd anniversary of Jesse Besser’s birth. At a ceremonial dinner where over 700 people were in attendance to help celebrate, ‘Doc’ said “We’re the people that buy Mr. Besser’s machines and make block. Mr. Besser’s success—of him being able to put out such a wonderful machine and make himself nationally and internationally famous—has been our success and helped us to prosper.”

Walter Underwood became the first executive director in 1957. At the convention in St. Louis, Missouri that year, the delegates heard Frank Lloyd Wright discuss his love affair with concrete block.

With the departure of Walter Underwood in 1968, the innovative director of the Florida association, Paul Lenchuck, took over and developed many successful educational and promotional programs for the association.

Prominent block producers took turns as the volunteer chairman of the board of NCMA. In 2003, Phil Potvin, president of Western Concrete, Cadillac, Michigan, was chairman. For 2004, Scott Weber of Basalite Concrete Products, Dixon, California, serves as chairman.

BESSER CLUBS

With strikes causing strife between hourly workers and management, Besser Company recognized the need for company-wide clubs that could unite workers in common interests. Besser employees returning from serving in the military liked the idea and suggested a Besser Rifle League. When it began in 1946, nearly every employee was a member. Currently, approximately 100 workers and their family members participate.

The following year, Jesse hired Ralph Michaud to organize and conduct a Besser Male Chorus. What began as just 12 voices swelled to 50 members with community involvement and has earned state and national recognition. The group sang at the inauguration of past Michigan Governor George W. Romney, at the Mackinac Bridge groundbreaking and dedication ceremonies, at Tiger Stadium in Detroit, the grand opening ceremonies for the World Center for Concrete Technology and Alpena Cancer Center, in addition to hundreds of regular performances.



Members of the Besser Rifle League enjoy a night of celebration at the 10th annual banquet.



The Besser Male Chorus founding director Ralph Michaud is in the white tuxedo.

Other sporting events sponsored by Besser Company included a Saturday night bowling league of ten teams, a golf league, and both softball and basketball teams in the Alpena city leagues.

In 1947, shop workers dropped the United Construction Workers Local 404 union, and changed to Alpena Independent Workers Association No. 1 with 357 votes. Harold Mercer, the union president, and Joe Pinson, head of the Besser personnel department, led negotiations between Besser Company and union representatives to reach a final agreement.

SHOULDICE MEETS BESSER

Not only a brilliant engineer, Jesse was also a shrewd financier who knew that a significant part of the success of selling a machine was collecting the payments. Jesse would not sell to any company—new or well established—

if he felt the potential customer could not afford the machine. It was not just the financial status of the business he appraised, but also the demand for concrete block within that area. Jesse actually researched his customers and the block user's customers to decide if the company had enough business to make payments.

Shouldice Designer Stone founder Bev Shouldice, of Ontario, Canada recalls his story of purchasing a Besser block machine. Bev formed Shouldice Cement Products Ltd. in 1947 to manufacture concrete products, and two years later expanded the company to specialize in concrete block. His successful company quickly forced smaller competitors out of business, and eventually the local demand required more block than his machines could produce. In order to fulfill orders, Bev purchased a few loads of block from a plant in Guelph, Ontario, and realized the block were superior to those made at his own plant ... and that they were manufactured on a Besser block machine. Bev learned that the Jesse Besser policy was to lease new Besser machines, and to collect by charging one cent per block manufactured. Excited, Bev drove to Alpena to meet with Jesse. He had no appointment, but he was invited to speak to Clem Mason who asked him several questions. Clem inquired about the Shouldice plant assets, the power and water supply, local block demand, local competition, source and volume of

MARX P. ROSENTHALER

Marx P. Rosenthaler, a certified public accountant, joined Besser Company in 1950 as a financial consultant and personal financial advisor to Jesse Besser. He founded his own accounting firm, M.P. Rosenthaler & Company in Alpena in 1924. Soon after joining Besser Company he was appointed vice president in charge of finance, a position that led directly to important roles in Jeana Corporation, and in 1944 the formation of the Besser Foundation and the Jesse Besser Fund in 1960. One of the outstanding projects of the Jeana Corporation in 1961, was development of the Thunder Bay Shopping Center, a major enterprise in which he was the driving force. The center opened with the anchor stores being Kroger, S.S. Kresge and Cunningham Drugs.

Marx was also very instrumental in setting up the successful lease program for Besser Company in 1948. Block machines were leased to customers and a rate was established whereby they would pay Besser Company each time the machine cycled. In 1964 the leases were sold to C.I.T. a leasing firm in New York.

As vice-president of the Besser Company finance department, a major task in itself, he also took on the presidency of the Alpena Corporation, an investment group of private individuals whose objective was to aid the city's industrial development. This was a group that owned the Gilwanigan property, the Lightweight Aggregate Corporation and was composed of major stockholders in Elastizell Corporation.

Marx played an active role in many community activities, was a charter member of the local Kiwanis Club and also a member of various Masonic and Shriners organizations.

A sudden heart attack, in August 1963, took his life at the age of 72.

aggregate, number of trucks, mixer size and whether or not he had any skip hoists. After answering Clem's questions, Bev realized his plant did not have much. Regardless, Clem recorded all the information from Bev and left him with a book to read, promising to return an hour later. True to his word, Clem returned an hour later and escorted him to meet with Jesse. Jesse reviewed the report and talked to Bev, who recalls, "He treated me like a customer he wanted to do business with . . . (but) he informed me that at the time I did not have sufficient assets to warrant a deal. However, he invited me to come back when I had more assets." Bev returned home to Shallow Lake, Ontario slightly discouraged but hopeful. He knew what he wanted to achieve, the trouble was finding a company to put its trust in him. To accommodate his current customers, Bev soon purchased a Belaire block machine, but returned it because of insufficient output. That same day he was sending the machine back, a salesman from the S. Vessot Company in Joliette, Canada arrived at his door, offering to install one of their machines with no obligation. The machine only produced block one-at-a-time, but along with the purchases from Guelph, it was enough to make slow progress. In 1957, Bev was able to build a new plant and finally purchase his first Besser block machine, mixer, skip hoist and off-bearing hoist. At this time James Richardson from Besser Canada helped Bev improve his block quality after they found out the aggregate was less than satisfactory for a good product. Shortly thereafter, automation was introduced with Besser equipment to efficiently move the finished product from the front of the machine and into and out of the curing kilns.



Bev Shouldice

The relationship between Besser and Shouldice continues to grow. In 2003, the third generation of Shouldices—Steve, Brad and Mark along with their parents, Rob and June—visited Alpena and selected a custom dual Dynapac plant to meet their future production needs for Shouldice Designer Stone. The unique twin Dynapacs, which were custom-built to their specifications, will produce the multitude of stone profiles manufactured by the company.

LIGHTWEIGHT AGGREGATE

In June of 1948 Besser purchased Lightweight Aggregate, an aggregate plant in Livonia, Michigan to ensure a constant supply of quality aggregate to producers. The company initially lost \$1 million but rebounded under the management of Mel Cruzen. After breaking even Besser Company sold the plant to the city of Livonia in 1949 for \$1 million.



Anna and Jesse Besser at the dedication of the First Congregational Church.

THE BESSER FUND

Back in Alpena, the Besser Foundation was concentrating its efforts on community projects. On 11 May 1949, a 22-acre parcel of land on the corner of Walnut and Miller Streets was donated to build Catholic Central High School. Four years later in 1953, the Besser Foundation laid the cornerstone of the new First Congregational Church and followed with over \$1 million in donations to build the church and school, working with general contractor Floyd Gagnon. Jesse and Anna were strong financial supporters of many community organizations. The Besser Fund was established in February of 1960 and funded with the proceeds from the sale of the Besser machine leases. The Besser Foundation and the Besser Fund were two private non-profit organizations established to serve public welfare by providing financial assistance to other qualified non-profit organizations. Within the first decade of its existence, the Fund donated over \$4 million under the motto coined by Jesse Besser, "To help institutions help themselves."

BES-AIR & THE BESCO CRUISER

It soon became apparent that business was hindered because travel to and from Alpena was somewhat difficult with the area's limited transportation options. In order to accommodate the rising number of customers and business travelers, Besser Manufacturing Company bought a twin-engine Beechcraft five passenger plane and formed the Bes-Air flight service in 1954. Located at Phelps Collins Air Base in Alpena, the plane averaged 100,000 miles a year, serving 600 to 800 passengers. Bes-Air was presented the Million Miler award by the National Business Aircraft Association for "accomplishing one million aircraft miles without physical injury to a single passenger or damage to aircraft."

The Beechcraft was replaced in 1968 with a King-Air eight passenger turbo-prop plane, which averaged three to four flying days a week with the remainder being utilized for maintenance. In 1998 Bes-Air, then a Lear Jet, carried a record 569 passengers and flew 107,973 miles, an equivalent of 433 aircraft hours.



Since 1990, Besser customers have been served by a B-20 King-Air.

The first pilots to fly Bes-Air were pilot Charles Seelye and co-pilot Paul Barrow, both hired in 1954. In 1966, Cleo Briley joined Bes-Air as co-pilot and later became the pilot. Ron Ball was one of the early co-pilots to fly with Cleo, then later Ken Robbins, who was replaced in 1985 by Russ Etter. Russ became the main pilot until his retirement in 1999. Since that time, pilots and co-pilots have been hired as needed.

Bes-Air's first flight scheduler was Paul Dane, who was replaced by Warren T. Libka when Dane joined the sales department and moved to Ohio. In addition to scheduling Bes-Air, Warren wrote commercial airline tickets for employees (until the airlines came to Alpena and opened an office), and handled the sales of mold attachments as part of the

sales department. Today Betsy Boyk handles Bes-Air scheduling, in addition to her responsibilities as national sales administrator. Many European prospects and customers were heard to remark — "Oh yes, Besser - they are the ones with their own airplane, aren't they?"

Besser Company also owned and operated a 38-foot cabin cruiser named "Besco," purchased in the late 1950s and primarily used to entertain customers. A twin-engine Chris-Craft equipped with a sport fisherman's bridge, it

100 YEARS



Bes-Air pilots pictured above.

often ferried customers on fishing cruises or up to Mackinac Island. It remained in service until 1990.

Captain Clem Mason, an architectural consultant for Besser Company and close friend of Phil Park, was completely responsible for the operation and care of the cruiser. Phil met Clem when he was playing drums in a Bay City band that performed in an Alpena nightclub on weekends. During the week, Clem worked in the auto

industry as a design artist. Phil recognized Clem's artistic talent and invited him to come to Besser Company and meet Jesse Besser. Jesse immediately invited him to join the Besser staff as an architectural consultant and to handle some of his personal real estate purchases.

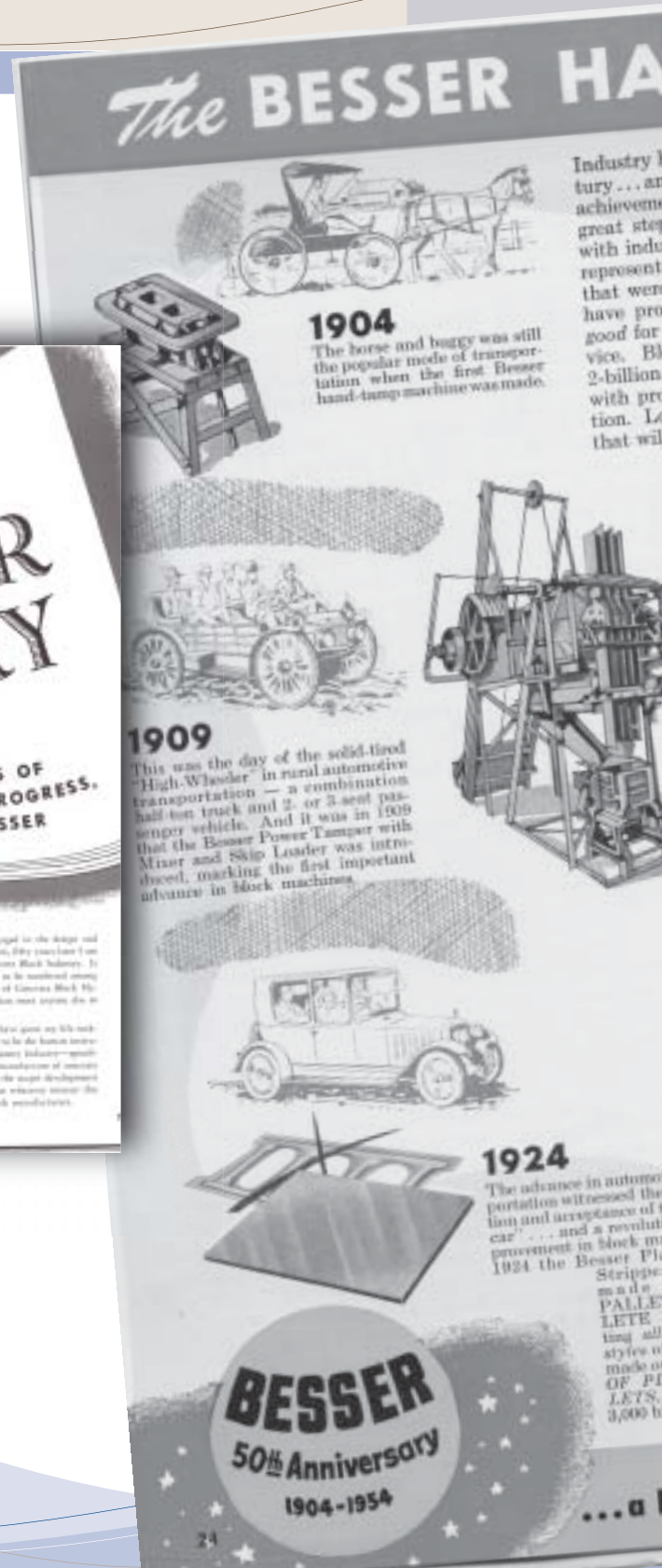
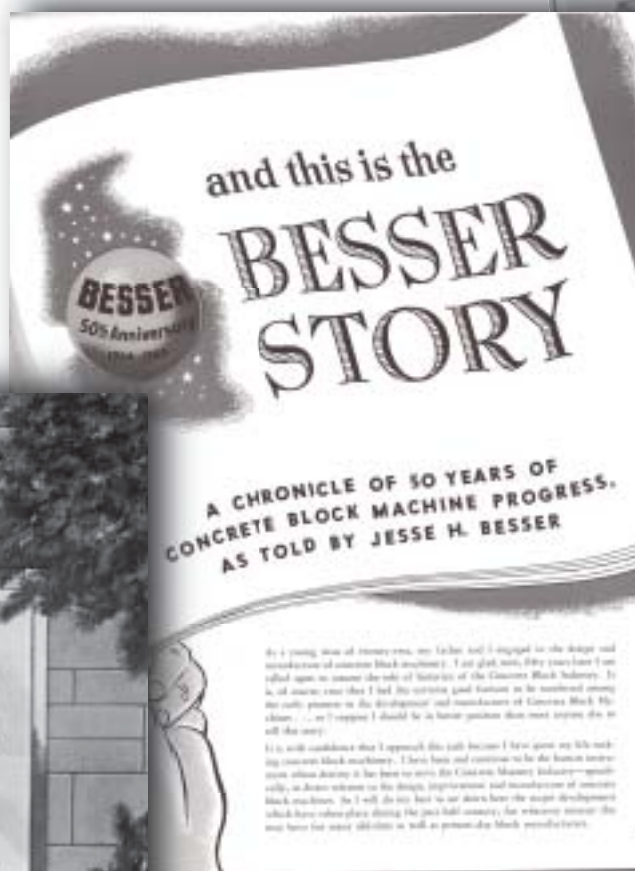
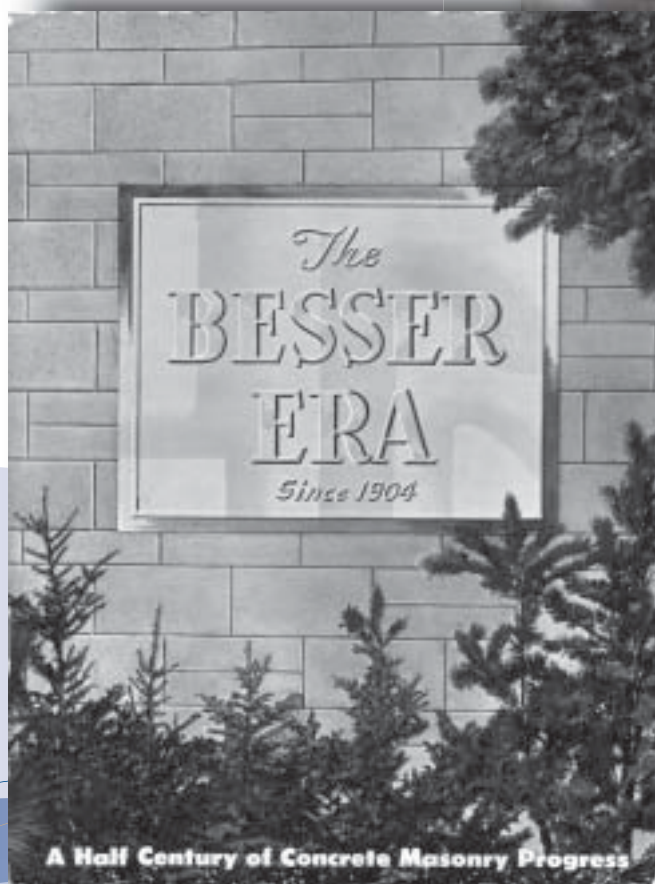


Opening page of the ship's log for the Besco cruiser.

SHIP'S LOG			
DATE	RAISED LOG	EXPENSES	
SHIP NAME	BESCO		
SHIP TYPE	ALPENA MICHIGAN		
OWNER	BESSER COMPANY		
REGISTER NUMBER	MC 1245 H	405 378	
HOME CALL	NW 9521		
LENGTH	38'-0"	BEAM	13'-0"
DECK	33 1/2"		
PERMANENT CREW	CHRIS CRAFT		
TONE CAPTAIN 200-GAL 44-4100			
DECKMAN BILL JR. 504 24 0000			
Clem Mason - Captain			

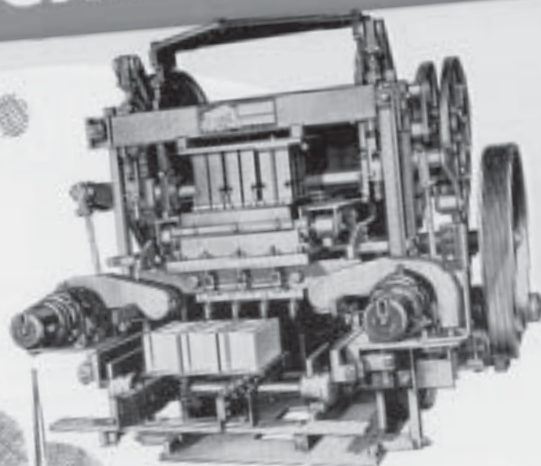
In 1954, this tribute to “the occasion of the Besser Manufacturing Company’s golden anniversary” was printed. Featuring a close-up photo of the First Congregational Church on its cover, this booklet chronicled the first 50 years of Besser achievements.

The book reads, “Here, in Michigan’s far North Country, rich in natural resources vitally needed by the building industry, the Besser Era had its modest beginning, and has flourished for half a century.”



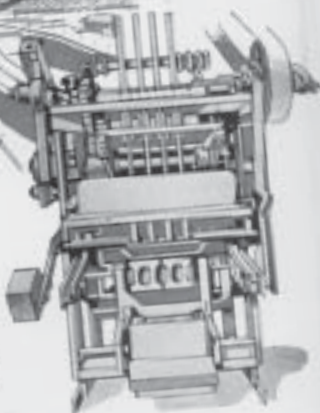
RECORD OF ACHIEVEMENT

1934
Along with great advances in aircraft, came an important Besser development — the FULLY FRESSED TOP Plain Pallet Stripper Tamper that made smoother finished work.

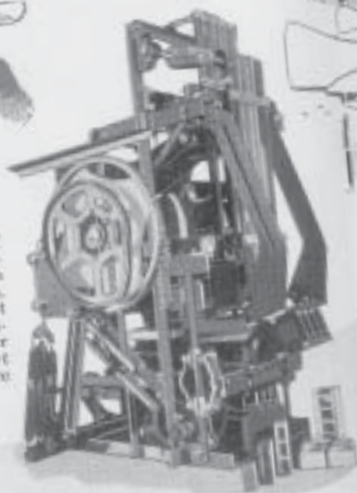


1939
This was the year the New York World's Fair dramatized industrial "miracles". It also marked the advent of the Besser VIBRAPAC, featuring unidirectional vibration under pressure, producing 5000 block per day.

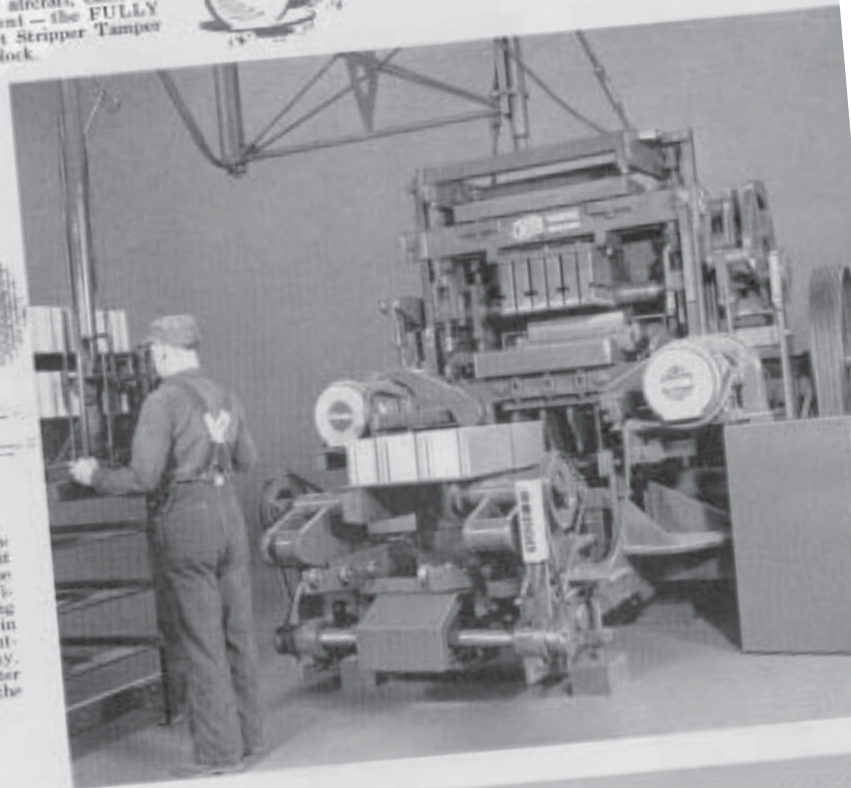
By the time the Panama Canal linked the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, Besser had developed this Fully Automatic Face-Down Machine that boosted block production to 1800 a day.



During this year of Commander Richard E. Byrd's South Pole Achievements, Boeser came out with the Cam Controlled Tamper for the Plain Pallet Strippers, for more positive control.



"Dream Cars" of the future were "in the making." And it was during this period that the Besser Front-Puller-Feed Vibrator with Power Off-bearing Hoist created a 60% increase in block production—with an output of 7,500 blocks per day. Now, in 1964, new, still greater advances are in store for the concrete block producer.



BESSER MANUFACTURING COMPANY • Alpena, Michigan, U.S.

Half Century of Concrete Masonry Progress

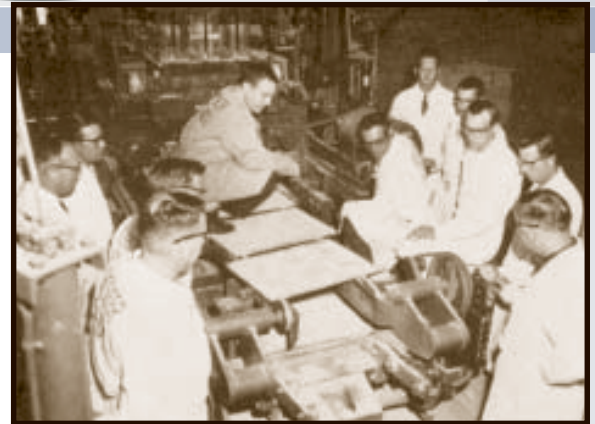
JOE PINSON

Joe Pinson was one of the leading figures in establishing the original technical service department and creating the program to sell Besser parts. The story goes that Joe operated a tire shop on Washington Avenue, and one day Jesse Besser stopped in and invited Joe to apply for a job with Besser Company. Joe, a Michigan State University graduate, was hired in 1941 as a sales-service engineer and plant superintendent. He later became personnel manager, a position he held until 1947, when he was promoted to vice president of the personnel department.

Joe started the service department which held parts order writers and an in-house catalog department where operating and parts catalogs were designed. From the 1940s through the late 1950s, Besser had an in-house print shop which produced most of the service catalogs and manuals, *Besser Block* magazine, *Besser News* and all the company's forms. In addition, he hired men to go on the road installing and servicing Besser equipment. Most of these men traveled out of Alpena and drove blue Ford station wagons.

To encourage the sale of more Besser parts and accessories, Joe worked with the catalog department in designing the Besser Parts and Accessories Catalog that was updated each year and still exists today. The catalog was originally designed for a sales program called "Spring Dating": a customer could order "genuine Besser parts" in the fall to update his Besser machinery during the winter months and payments weren't due until spring. "Joe Besco" was another popular promotion, a cartoon character used in many ads promoting genuine Besser parts. Joe was also instrumental in organizing a network of warehouses; one of the first opened in Buffalo, New York. He continued to oversee the service department as vice president until he retired in July 1968.

Joe worked with the catalog department in designing the Besser Parts and Accessories Catalog that was updated each year and still exists today.



Students learning hands-on in Besser Research and Training Center.

1954: MORE CHANGES

Along with the new air service, 1954 brought about a handful of events that again separated Besser Company from its competitors. First, the "Manufacturing" in Besser Manufacturing Company was omitted, shortening the official company name to Besser Company. Then, the Vibrapac® (V3R) gained two new features, a Front-Pallet-Feed and Power Off-Bearing Hoist, which increased possible production to 7500 block per ten-hour day on the V3R.

Lastly and perhaps most radically, the manufacturing company expanded its influence into the realm of training and teaching. Jesse Besser and Carl Olsen envisioned a school for concrete products producers that would teach workers the newest blockmaking techniques and machine capabilities. The Besser Research and Training Center (changed in 1963 to Blockmakers Workshops®) was developed and located on the west end of the shop assembly line. A complete block plant and classroom were built to allow for both material/machine testing and teaching classes. Phil Park was appointed director of Besser Research and Training with Karl Nensewitz appointed as the first manager. Bob Rohn, Dick Taber,

Frank Smigelski, Lyle Dowling and Barney Stafford were installed as instructors. Glen Radke handled clerical duties while Martin Werner took care of maintenance.

AUTOMATION: THE BESSER-MATIC®

Automation arrived in 1956, and without hesitation Besser jumped at the chance to make parts and accessories for all aspects of the block making process in Besser quality and style. The first, the Besser-Matic®, was a block loader and unloader, which removed the pallets of block from the front delivery conveyor of the Vibrapac® and placed them onto steel racks. The full racks were transported by lift truck to steam-heated kilns to cure the block. From there, the racks were placed on conveyors leading to the depalleter which removed block from pallets and then the block were arranged into cubes for shipment. The first Besser-Matic® was sold to Standard Block in Lansing, Michigan in 1956. Automatic Shuttle Cars were developed a few years later to replace the manually operated lift trucks that carried the racks between the kilns



Jesse with philanthropist C.S. Mott (left) and Governor George Romney.

and the Besser-Matic®. The combination of Automatic Shuttle Cars and the Besser-Matic® increased handling productivity to 24,000 block per 10-hour-day.

ANNA PASSES AWAY

On 23 September 1958, Alpena mourned the death of Anna Besser at the age of 76. Anna had not only been a loyal wife to Jesse Besser, but was also his closest companion, friend and business partner and had served as Besser Company vice president. She was also very active in community affairs, Women's Civic League and the Order of the Eastern Star. To recognize her community service, a new elementary school was built on Wilson Street in Alpena in 1958 and named Anna M. Besser Elementary. From 1963 to 1983, it served as a Junior High School until declining enrollment forced its closure. It was reopened in 1986 as an elementary school.

PHILANTHROPY

In 1960, Besser Company purchased 57 acres of land next to the production facility on Johnson Street in Alpena, Michigan and donated it to Alpena Community College. The following year Besser Company donated \$1 million dollars to construct the Besser Technical Center over the next two years.





Dedication of the Besser Natural area. Left to right: Director Ralph MacMullan, Jesse Besser, Commissioner Harry Whiteley, Senator Thomas Schweigert.

The charitable reach of Jesse Besser went far beyond his geographical community, and his generosity was recognized through numerous awards and honors. Jesse was named one of 1962's ten outstanding Michigan leaders, along with Flint philanthropist C. S. Mott. In the fall of 1963 he was granted the Silver Medallion, a Citizen's Award by the Greater Michigan Foundation for "Monumental Contributions to Education." This was in addition to two birthday galas presented to him by the Alpena community on the 72nd anniversary of his birth date in 1954 and another in 1962 on his 80th. At his 80th party, Jesse sincerely expressed his appreciation to an audience of 500 friends including fellow community leaders, saying: "It gives me so much pleasure to be here with you . . . Both of these events will be among my most precious memories." Tom G. Fletcher, whom the Alpena News described as a "smooth, enjoyable and unobtrusive master of ceremonies," led the celebration. Jesse was presented with a two-volume binding of congratulatory letters from friends in the

United States and abroad. The delightful program also included a mystery cast in a "This Is Your Life" presentation featuring influential people from his past.

Jesse had long wished to commemorate Alpena's ties to lumbering days, an industry that had settled the northeast Lower Peninsula and had been long abandoned. In 1965, Clem Mason, Besser Company architect and close friend to Jesse, found 112 acres of land with virgin pine and 4125 feet of shoreline in Presque Isle County. He mentioned it to Jesse. The owner, local realtor Orville Murch, was asking \$135,000 for the property but sold it to Jesse for \$92,000 because his intentions were to preserve it for future generations. This historic forest was formerly called "Bell Pines" because it contained the ruins of Bell Village, an old logging town and Native American gravesite. A lagoon that lies between the forest and Lake Huron contains a sunken ship hull from the 1800s. It is one of many wrecks that have recently been identified by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration as



Placing the cornerstone at Besser Bell are Garnet Brandt, Ray Kinsel and Jim Park.

historical treasures. The Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary and Underwater Preserve is the first freshwater sanctuary and only the second sanctuary to focus solely on the protection of historic shipwrecks in the U.S. Bell Pines was renamed Besser Natural Area and is one of only two Lower Peninsula parks with virgin pine timber. When the area was dedicated, Jesse wrote, "It is delightful to be here today for dedication of this natural area...these glorious pines remind us of the old days, our ancestry ... this marker, this beautiful piece of limestone commemorates today."

Adjacent to the park is a clubhouse conceived by Eldon Thompson, designed by Ray Kinsel and built by workers and volunteers under the supervision of Elvin Liske. "Mr. Park called me into his office on 8 June 1971 and work on the Bell began 9 June 1971," Eldon recalled. The concrete block structure with an attractive view of Lake Huron was completed one year and two weeks later and is used for Blockmakers Workshops graduations, community functions, training sessions and by the Bell members for personal events.

In May 1966, the Jesse Besser Museum was dedicated thanks to a \$750,000 donation and land from the Jesse Besser Fund. To show appreciation, the community of Alpena raised money for the museum planetarium.

In 1968, Jesse Besser asked the U.S. Tax Court to set aside a \$4,874,895 tax deficiency filed against him by the Internal Revenue Service. Jesse, at the age of 85, former sole owner and now a major stockholder of Besser Company, denied that he personally benefited from the 1961 sale of company assets when the machinery leases were turned over to the Besser Fund. In its judgment, the IRS placed the value of the machinery at \$7,410,019 and ordered Jesse to pay income tax on that amount. The IRS later dropped the lawsuit against him.



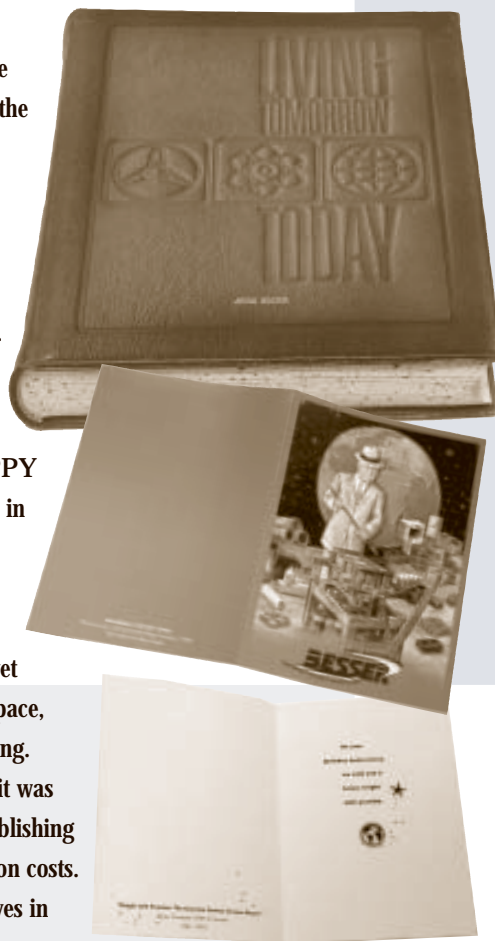
Bell Pines clubhouse.

BESSER BELL PINES

Commemorating the 75th Anniversary of Besser Company, a limited edition of 150 silk-screened prints were produced. The original artwork was by Dorothy Gheen of Alpena. Dorothy, a well-known artist both on the state and national level, has artistically documented visual and historical aspects of northeastern Michigan. This serigraph in three colors on d'Arches Cover Stock was printed by Tom Allen of the graphic arts department at Alpena Community College.

CREATING MEMORIES

One of the most popular items that Jesse Besser shared with customers was known as the “birthday book”. This was a leather-bound book purchased from the novelty company Brown and Bigelow for about \$14. Each year a different book was mailed to Besser customers, arriving in time for the anniversary of their birth date. The cover of the brown leather book had the customer name embossed in gold and the exterior of the back cover was personalized with “HAPPY BIRTHDAY” and a Jesse Besser signature in gold. After Jesse passed away, the program continued, using the signature of Phil Park rather than that of Jesse. The books contained interesting subjects that were not yet popular or well-known, like flights to outer space, underwater diving and environmental planning. The program ran from 1947 to 1974 when it was discontinued because the vendor stopped publishing the books due to a large increase in production costs. Many block plant owners installed bookshelves in their offices to display the books, of which they were



For nearly a quarter-century Besser has commissioned an artist to create a custom birthday anniversary card. The cards are mailed to customers around the world and hand delivered to employees.

Inspired by articles in several of the “Birthday Books” Besser Company stopped using coal in the foundry to produce blades and liners because of air pollution, and switched to the more expensive and environmentally friendly electric furnaces.

very proud. In fact, there were occasional disputes within a family as to the proper ownership of the cherished and valuable collection of books.

INNOVATIVE GOVERNANCE

In the 1960s, Jesse Besser developed several innovative business strategies. One, which was quite rare, was the selection of a group of outside directors to sit on the board of the family company. In fact, he appointed a *majority* of outside directors, a practice that continues today.

The early directors were typically bankers, attorneys or executives in other manufacturing companies. Among them were Edward Adams Jr., a senior banker from the National Bank of Detroit; Morgan Collins, a professor of management at the University of Michigan and a former Ford Motor Company executive; and Harold Schaefer, an engineering manager for Willys-Jeep.

Also serving as directors who helped guide Besser Company during its development were: Carl Reitz of Reitz and LaFleche, CPAs; Ed Turner, a manufacturing executive at Camtec International; and Philip G. Moon, an international banker from National Bank of Detroit.

A special person who held the Board of Directors together at many a meeting was Harold “Harry” A. Ruemenapp. He joined the board in 1966 when he replaced his departed partner, Fred Kennedy, at Butzel, Long law firm. Harry followed up the excellent advice he had offered to Jesse Besser with some wise counsel to Phil Park and then Jim Park. Harry retired from the board in 2002.



Philip M. Park

CHAPTER THREE: **Expanding Globally**

The tumultuous mid-sixties brought about social revolutions in all aspects of life in America.

Freedoms were being asserted everywhere with anti-discrimination rallies in black communities, union changes and protests against the Vietnam War. Besser

Company was simultaneously adjusting for the new environment. Phil Park was elected president of Besser Company in February 1965. He maintained his office on the second floor of the old office building (the former Alpena Flyer building). He had one of the first “Open Door” policies, meaning that any employee could meet with him anytime that he was free. This philosophy was in keeping with the changing times all around the world, and helped create better, more open relationships between management and the shop employees. It was an interesting contrast with the style of Jesse Besser.



IRVING "CHRIS" CHRISTOPHERSON

Another well-known worker at Besser Company was Irving Christopherson, whose career spanned over 48 years. He was hired in May 1943 and worked for the personnel department as a mailman and first aid attendant. He would make daily rounds of the office, transferring inter-office mail, plus picking up and delivering U.S. mail to the Alpena Post Office. Often, he would drive Jesse to Detroit to catch the train and drove Anna about town on her errands.

"Chris", as he was nicknamed, was born and raised in Alpena, and enjoyed many years of hunting with the Park family at the KMP Klub during the November deer season. In 1955, Chris joined the international sales department managed by Ralph Bailey, and in 1957 he was sent to the Shouldice plant in Owen Sound, Ontario, Canada to install a Besser V3-M. He also helped Richard Sullivan organize Besser Canada Ltd. in 1959, with a sales office and warehouse located in Bramalea, Ontario, where Richard became the manager. In February 1991, Chris retired, having spent most of his career in the export department.

In 1968, the shop union joined United Stone and Allied Product Workers of America, AFL-CIO as Local 209. Currently, Gordon Udell serves as president. In 1984, the members of the Alpena office union voted to join the Boilermakers and remain with them as of 2004. Timothy Jones currently serves as president.

Promotional note pads used in 1966 and 1967.



OFFICE WORKERS UNITE

In September 1966, the Besser Company office union voted to become part of the United Cement Lime & Gypsum Workers, International Union (AFL-CIO). The following year in May the new group decided the best approach was to go on strike, and about 90 Besser office, clerical and engineering workers participated. Honoring the picket line were 360 shop workers of the Alpena Independent Workers Association Local #1.

The 1960s were also about improving lifestyles. Established under the Social Security Amendments of 1965, President Johnson signed the Medicare Act, providing health insurance to people age 65 and older. In 1966, science fiction gained mainstream acceptance when *Star Trek* aired on NBC in prime time. That same year the National Organization for Women was founded and presided over by Betty Friedan. Through legislative lobbying, litigation and demonstrations it attempted to end discrimination against women. Jesse also felt the need to make some alterations in 1966. Following the example set by other philanthropists such as Henry Ford, Jesse dropped the "H" from his official name. This meant the "H" had to be removed from all plaques, letterheads and buildings. Friends had fun reminding Jesse Besser that Al Capone and Jesse James had no middle initials either.

Meanwhile, the newly formed Jesse Besser Fund donated \$400,000 to build the Besser Technical Center at Alpena Community College for expansion of the Blockmakers Workshops® program.



Besser sales and administration managers in front of Besser Technical Center at Alpena Community College, 1966.

KEY MANAGEMENT STAFF IN 1969

1969 saw the naming of the following managers: George Stevens, assistant manufacturing manager; Harry Cruzen, Jr., director of engineering; Herman Wagner, assistant manufacturing manager; Jack Mitchell, sales manager; Lucas Pfeiffenberger, Besser research and training manager; Richard Bingham, secretary and assistant treasurer; Gerald Krueger, personnel director; Donald McVicar, export manager; Weir Gresham, assistant design engineer; Jack LaPine, engineer; Karl Nensewitz, service manager; Don Hampton, vice president of finance & treasurer; Ray Bailey, vice president of purchasing & manufacturing; and Ellis Woodruff, vice president of sales. Phil Park was president and Jesse Besser, chairman of the board.

One stroke of genius Jesse had was incentivizing regional managers as early as 1964. Key managers were given a bonus that included cash and common stock, which

is ownership in Besser Company. Starting with five key managers in 1964, the number of employees who have earned stock based on their performance has grown to over 150 employees and their spouses.

A shareholder is granted stock at the price prevailing at the time of receipt and then, upon retiring, the employee is paid for the shares at the prevailing price. Several employees have created nice wealth based on this supplemental compensation.

A major shift in the culture of Besser Company occurred in 1964 when five key managers of the company were presented with shares of Besser stock. Prior to this time, only family members held shares. Up until 1996, the only way for an employee to become a shareholder was to be given shares as part of their compensation package. Currently, a program is in place allowing employees to purchase shares with the goal of allowing every employee the opportunity to invest and share in the company's success.

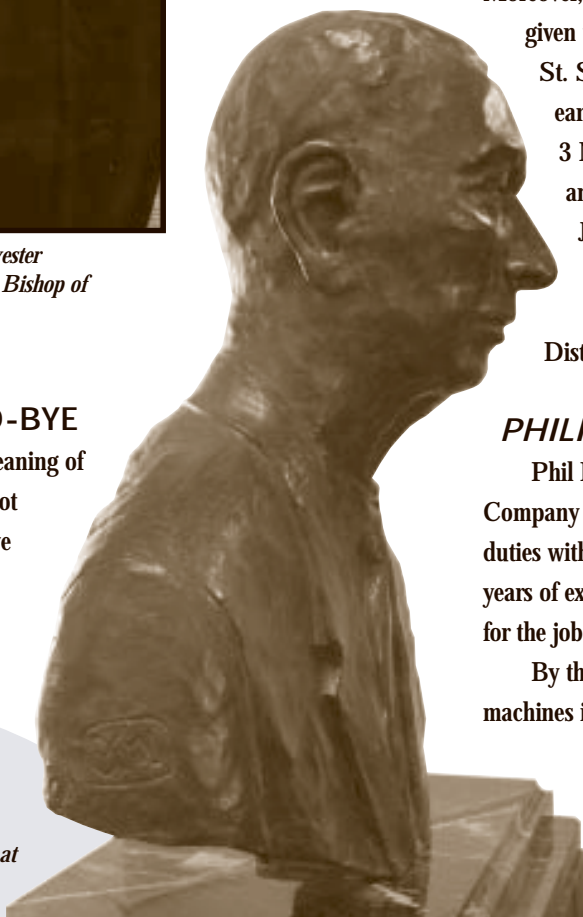
Other than the early 1990s and the business recession of 2000 – 2001, the price of Besser stock owned by employees has a record of increasing value every year for over 40 years. So, when an employee shareholder retires, there is a nice supplemental retirement benefit available for having added value to the company over the years.



Jesse receives the prestigious and rare Order of St. Sylvester Commendation from the Most Reverend Francis Reh, Bishop of Saginaw, Michigan on behalf of Pope Paul VI.

ORDER OF ST. SYLVESTER COMMENDATION AND GOOD-BYE

Nelson Henderson once said, "The true meaning of life is to plant trees, under whose shade you do not expect to sit." Jesse and Anna Besser would have firmly agreed. Ardent Congregationalists, they maintained a belief in equality among Christian



Bust of Jesse Besser displayed at the Jesse Besser Museum.

religions and never discriminated as to whom was more deserving of Foundation funds. The multitude of donations given to education, church and health services over the years earned Jesse the prestigious and rare Order of St. Sylvester Commendation by the Roman Catholic Church in 1969. On behalf of Pope Paul VI, the Most Reverend Francis Reh, Bishop of Saginaw, Michigan presented the esteemed medallion and ribbon to Jesse. Jesse Besser was the only Michigan citizen ever granted this, the highest Catholic commendation for a layman. Moreover, it was the first time that the Commendation was given to a non-Catholic. Perhaps appropriately, the St. Sylvester medallion ended up to be Jesse's final earthly award. Jesse passed away the next year on 3 May 1970, days shy of his 88th birthday anniversary and third community birthday gala. Jesse's brother Walter died prior to Jesse on 21 February 1969. Walter spent his entire adult life living and working in the Alpena Business District as a salesman.

PHILIP M. PARK, CEO

Phil Park, who had been president of Besser Company since 1965, now presided over administrative duties with the passing of Jesse Besser. With nearly 37 years of experience under his belt, he was well prepared for the job and looked forward to expanding overseas.

By this time, Besser had 122 Vibrapac block machines in the United States, Canada and over 28 other countries. It almost seemed a prerequisite for the CEO of Besser Company be actively involved in numerous company and civic concerns. Jesse had spent much of his time and money expanding the surrounding

community, and Phil was dedicated to serving in local groups by involving his time and talents. He was an active member of the Besser golf and bowling teams, and in the late 1940s and early 1950s supported the Besser softball team in the city softball league. He was the local chapter chairman of the American Red Cross, an organizer of the local United Fund, fund chairman for the local council of Boy Scouts of America, on the board of directors of Alpena Public Schools, president of the Jesse Besser Museum, and a member of the Masonic Order, Elks, Alpena Country Club, Yacht Club and Rotary Club of Alpena. In 1962 Phil had served as Governor of District 631 Rotary Club for which he proudly performed duties in both state and national offices. One of his passions was to attend a Rotary meeting wherever in the world his travels took him. His dedication to the Club earned him the Paul Harris Fellow in 1977, the highest award given by the International Organization of Rotary.



Phil, Jim, Susan, Patricia and Maxine at Christmas.

Phil was also involved in significant activities beyond Alpena County, acting as director of the National Concrete Masonry Association, director of Michigan Mutual Insurance Co., of Detroit, and director of the National Business Aircraft Association, Michigan Manufacturers Association and the Michigan Chamber of Commerce.



Jesse Besser and Phil Park stand together with the Besser water sphere in the background.

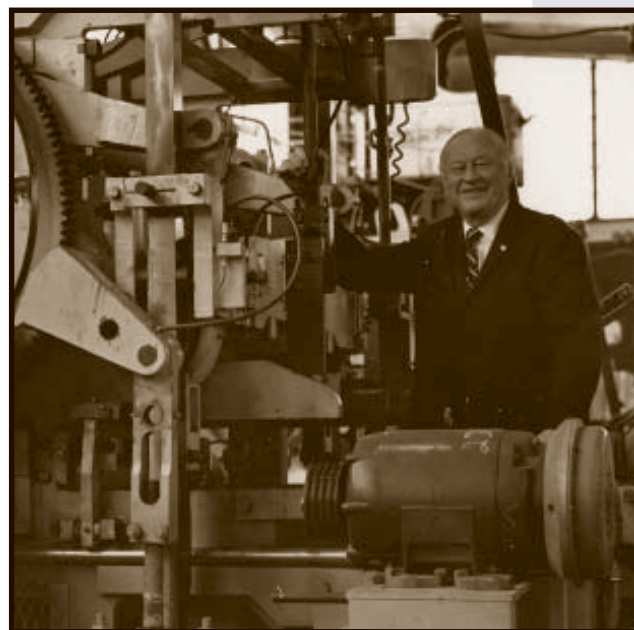


Phil Park in Joe Stepanski's 1930 Model A pickup.

ELLIS R. "WOODY" WOODRUFF

Woody, the name most everyone called him, was born in Springville, New York. He served in the United States Army during the U.S.S. San Pablo incident in China in 1932. Shortly thereafter, he became a test pilot for Bell Aircraft of Ohio, and then in 1935 he joined the IBM Corporation. During World War II he was re-inducted into the Army Air Corps, where he rose to the rank of Colonel, and following the war, he returned to IBM.

It was in 1950 that Woody accepted a sales position with Besser Company. After a few short years as a salesman on the road he was promoted to sales manager, and then in 1964 he was promoted to vice president, sales and marketing, a position he held until he retired in 1977. Woody was famous for his remarks when asked for a sales forecast. For instance, he would answer, "I'm not giving you a forecast today because it will change tomorrow." Woody is well remembered for having the amazing ability to go into one of his favorite sales districts and pick up a large order when activity in the shop was slow. He was an active member of Rotary International and the Elks. Perhaps his favorite activity away from work was his hunting camp. Woody often took customers there to entertain them with a steak dinner and a ride through the woods on his "coot" (all-terrain vehicle).



Phil Park with a Vibrapac.

Phil was a trustee of Olivet College and Cleary College in Ypsilanti, Michigan from 1970 to 1974. He also held two honorary doctorate degrees; one in engineering from the University of Barranquilla in Columbia and one in science from Cleary College. Phil was also among Alpena's many proud World War II veterans, having served as a Lieutenant in the U.S. Navy Reserve. Initially during his service, Phil was assigned to the purchasing division of the Bureau of Ships of the U.S. Department of the Navy in Washington, D.C., but later he became an air combat intelligence officer in the Pacific Theater of Operations before finally returning to Washington to an assistant to Senator Hugh Scott in 1945. Phil married Ella Maxine Bradley on 20 June 1935. Together they raised three children: one son, James, the current chairman and CEO of Besser Company, and two daughters, Patricia, a state congresswoman in Georgia who resides in Atlanta with her husband Jerry Gardner, and Susan who is married to Dr.



The Besser Company secretarial pool. "The Girls" typed all correspondence.

Tony Krausen and resides in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Phil's leisure time involved many sports. He enjoyed watching Alpena High School football games and attended whenever he was in town. Phil and Mel Cruzen, a close friend and business associate, teed off at a local golf course every Wednesday. Phil also entertained customers, friends and other visitors at the KMP Klub, his hunting lodge 18 miles north of Alpena on US-23. The mysterious name is explained in the original owners: "K" for friend and business partner Charlie Kimball; "M" for Clem Mason, a trusted associate and "P" for Park.



KMP Klub located north of Alpena on US-23.



Besser Management - January 1969

Back row left to right: Dick Bingham, George Stevens, Gerald "Feeney" Kruger, Pete Cruzen, Don McVicar, Herman Wagner, Weir Gresham, Jack Mitchell, Jack LaPine, Lucas Pfeifferberger, Karl Nensewitz. Front row left to right: Don Hampton, Phil Park, Jesse Besser, Ray Bailey, Ellis "Woody" Woodruff.

LAKEHOUSE MEETINGS

The Besser management team met each Friday at noon over soup and sandwiches to review operations, firm up the shipping schedule for the future and discuss in-depth one important topic each week. Topics were very diverse and included such subjects as

inventory, accounts receivable, sales, budgets and research and training. Located directly across the street from the plant, the Lakehouse is a small, simple building sitting on the shore of Lake Besser. The building comfortably holds only about 15 people, the amenities are sparse, a fireplace is the only source of heat and there is no restroom. This led to meetings that were relatively short and to the point.



The Japan Besser Club was comprised of Besser machinery owners in Japan.

THE BESSER OVERSEAS CORPORATION

Phil Park had a dream and a plan to move Besser Company further into the international business arena. Since his first overseas sale in 1937, Phil had envisioned the unlimited possibilities awaiting the company across the globe. With this in mind, he formed the Besser Overseas Corporation. Phil realized that Besser machines were

Phil Park, Besser Company chairman of the board, third from left, Don McVicar, export manager, first from left and Luis Arias, district manager Europe, far right, welcome Soviet delegation to Alpena.



renowned worldwide but the availability of parts in distant locations was inadequate. In order to accommodate this, he was instrumental in the formation of Besser Canada, Besser A. G. in Switzerland and Besser Australia so that block manufacturers could quickly access needed parts or new machines through regional distributors. This strategy was a stroke of brilliance, securing Besser as the world leader in concrete machinery. Overseas sales volume matched domestic sales volume and annual sales more than doubled from \$12 million in 1964 to \$30 million in 1974.

One of the largest overseas sales was finalized in 1972 by Besser representative Luis Arias, with the sale of five silo stave block plants—used to produce grain silos—to Russia at a price of \$2,000,000. In 2004, several of these plants were still in operation.

In June 1973, Phil Park accepted the President's "E" Award on behalf of over 750 Besser Company

employees. Created in 1961 by the United States government, the award is the nation's highest honor in recognizing the continuous growth in sales outside the United States with positive contributions to the U.S. economy. Michigan Governor William Milliken and George Campbell, an international trade specialist for the U.S. Department of Commerce, presented the award along with Alpena Mayor William Gilmet. Phil Richards, editor of the Alpena News, was the master of ceremonies.



Presenting the "E" Award to Phil Park is Michigan Governor William Milliken, George Campbell, an international trade specialist for the United States Department of Commerce, and Alpena Mayor William Gilmet.



In 1994, Besser was awarded another award: the "E" Star for continuing to grow international sales. Governor John Engler was present for this award along with Dean Peterson from the United States Department of Commerce, and Phil Richards acted as master of ceremonies.

PHIL PARK MAKES A MARK

Businessman Phil Park had a career full of accomplishments. He approved the sale of eight Vibrapacs to be shipped simultaneously to Superlite in Phoenix, Arizona in 1958. It was highly unusual for Besser Company to sell so many machines to the same company, since it had been a Jesse Besser rule that only one machine be sold per 50 mile radius. However, the marketplace was changing, and Phil realized that if Besser did not place the machine, the competition would. In June 1967, the sales dollars for the export department were again boosted with the sale of a Vibrapac to South Vietnam.

DIVERSIFICATION

Not each and every foray into new businesses worked wonders. As part of the Ulrich Company (Illinois) purchase in 1969, Besser acquired the rights to a cable plow. This device moved down the highway and buried cable using an orbital action. Besser management chose not to spend the resources to develop a wide range of models for the industry and subsequently dropped out of the business.

South Viets Kill 150 Viet Cong in Heavy Fighting

By EUGENE V. RISHER

SAIGON (UPI) -U.S. Marines stormed a heavily defended hilltop position just south of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) for the second time today and heavy fighting was reported. Ten miles to the south, South Vietnamese killed 150 Viet Cong in another battle.

Casualty figures on both sides were not available. The fighting raged on today.

—NEWS REPORT FROM
JUNE 5, 1967, THE ALPENA NEWS

DONALD HAMPTON

Donald G. Hampton was born in Rogers City, Michigan in 1913 and spent much of his life in the Alpena and Ossineke area. After graduating from Alpena High School, his greatest desire was to learn about finance. He completed correspondence courses in higher accounting and office management through LaSalle Trade School. He worked as a bookkeeper for three years at the Alpena Livestock Commission at a wage of \$20 a week. He was also employed for a year and a half as the assistant secretary-treasurer at the National Farm Loan Association. For a while he worked as a self-employed carpenter. In 1943, he worked as a storekeeper at the Army Air Base in Alpena.

He began his career with Besser Company in 1944 as a clerk. In 1965 he moved up to treasurer and the same year was appointed vice president in charge of finance. He also held significant positions at Besser Industries in Roanoke, Illinois and Besser Canada Ltd. Don's brother-in-law, Don Sylvester, was also a long-time Besser employee.

Don Hampton worked closely with Marx Rosenthaler making lease arrangements for Besser customers. He served not only on the Board of Directors of Besser Company, but also on the Board of the Besser Foundation for a number of years. Don was an expert in arranging financing for international customers, and was very much involved in handling the sales of the Besser leases to C.I.T. These funds became a major source for Besser Foundation grants.

Outside of Besser work, he was very interested in the Credit Union movement and in the 1950s helped to establish the Marion Credit Union, currently the Alpena Alcona Area Credit Union. He was also a charter member of the Besser Credit Union.

A relatively quiet person, Don was not often seen walking the halls of the office or wandering about the shop. However, whenever he was involved in meetings, he broke the monotony by telling one of his many jokes. Don retired from Besser Company in 1976.

Instead, the facility, was converted into a Besser cuber manufacturer and parts warehouse. Another diversification venture included Vincent Company near Tampa, Florida. This company produced waste material recovery equipment such as finding a use for orange peels, and was eventually sold at a profit.

A resource allocation issue raised its head when Besser, through a contact at Ulrich, came in contact with Wasteco Systems of Tualatin, Oregon. This outfit was a leader in pollution control engineering and made equipment to burn all types of waste materials including sewage, industrial waste and pathological materials. Without an engineering resource east of the Mississippi, there was no technical support, so when the Oregon company went under, Besser quickly exited the business.

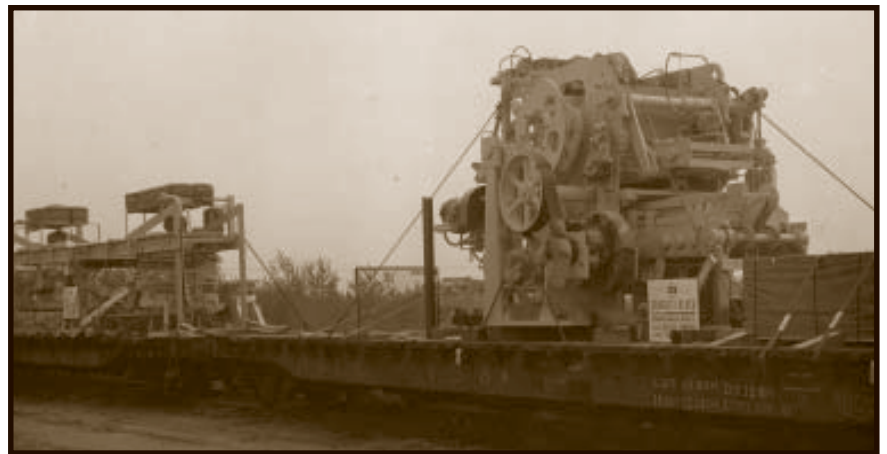
Another innovative Phil Park move was to purchase the inventory of a concrete masonry machinery manufacturer called Go-Corp, a company that manufactured two-at-a-time block machines, since the design of the machine and molds was almost the same as Besser machinery. Besser had been selling mold parts to producers operating Go-Corp equipment for some time. Therefore, the intent was that as the Go-Corp machines wore out, they would be replaced by Besser machines, since the producer had a comfort level already established from buying parts.

In 1970, Phil arranged another wise purchase. John and George Baker, brothers who owned and operated Baker Sheet Metal, located on the corner of Grant and Ripley Streets, approached Phil Park offering to sell their business. Since they had already been doing some manufacturing for Besser Company at peak times, Phil could see this would be a good addition to Besser Company.

In 1973, a group of Besser managers pooled their money and purchased the major interest in Baker. In 1976, Wes Ball approached the Besser managers who were stockholders of Baker and purchased the building. Shortly thereafter, Besser repurchased all the stock from managers and constructed a new facility north of Alpena and renamed the company Baker Enterprises.

Phil Park introduced innovations that reached not only globally and nationally, but also locally. Many

Transporting machines by rail.



important shop improvements were installed to improve efficiency and bring the facility up to date, such as the tram-rail system that helped greatly for storing parts and conserving floor space. He also ensured that all the shop machinery was updated, and that the coal-burning furnace in heat treat was replaced with a gas-fired furnace.

Groundbreaking in September 1971 for the building on Chisholm Street, which was jointly owned by Besser and Huron Portland Cement Credit Unions. Pictured left to right: Elroy Gapske, Garney Brandt, Al Siegert, Karl Nensewitz, Percy Snyder, Phil Park, Erv Neumann and Dick Wallace.

ELDON F. THOMPSON

Eldon F. Thompson began his career with Besser in 1942 working in the shop under an apprentice training program. One year later, he entered the U. S. Marine Corps, returning to Besser in 1946. In 1957, he was appointed superintendent of the night shift, and in 1958 he received another promotion to master mechanic. In 1967 he left Besser, returning in 1969 to become plant manager, a position he held until his retirement in 1985. Eldon continued to be an active member in the Shriners and received his honorary 33rd degree in the Masons in 1982.

Leo Adams served as plant manager prior to Eldon Thompson and left Besser in 1968. Leo replaced Raymond Douglas following his retirement. Leo had previously worked for Saginaw Steering and brought with him many motivating improvements to the shop.

LUCAS E. PFEIFFENBERGER

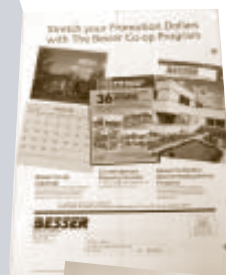
Lucas E. Pfeiffenberger was recruited a few years after he graduated from the University of Illinois with a masters degree in ceramic engineering in 1957. Lucas was tough to sell on the value of concrete over ceramics. However, once he became convinced that cement was “the most economical glue for putting together aggregates for building materials”, he became a strong proponent of concrete and a leader of the Besser School. Lucas, a well-respected speaker, traveled the world educating construction professionals on the merits of concrete.

One of the attractions to Alpena for Lucas was a young lady named Janet Grant, and their budding romance led to marriage. Lucas retired in 1989, and long-time instructor Bob Rohn became the leader of the Blockmakers Workshops® program.

THE CO-OP ADVERTISING PROGRAM

Besser Company holds the belief that responsibility to the industry goes beyond manufacturing equipment; we need to help promote the end product. Over the years the promotion of concrete masonry has taken on many forms. There have been beautiful color printed brochures and flyers demonstrating the different styles of block in use with room for the customer to have company information printed. The “Modular Book” showing the basics of construction with block, business cards shaped like block, miniature scale model concrete block and block clocks, block scales (ruler like devices) and home plan books have been offered.

The most popular and longest lasting of the programs is the “Co-op” calendar, featuring full color photos showcasing concrete masonry and landscape products used in projects around the globe. Producers generously provide the photos for the calendar, and can purchase the calendars, customized with their company imprint at nominal cost.





James C. Park

CHAPTER FOUR: **Product Line Growth**

Besser Company ushered in the new year of 1977 with significant administrative changes.

Jim Park was named president while his father, Phil, remained chairman of the board of directors and CEO. Jim had risen through the ranks at Besser from director of management services in 1969, to vice president for administrative services in August 1972, and finally executive vice president in October 1973, before accepting the role of president of Besser Company in 1977.



GEORGE B. STEVENS

George Stevens, born and raised in Alpena, was the oldest of ten children. He graduated from Alpena High School in 1945 and obtained a degree in industrial management from the University of Detroit in 1951. Prior to graduating he served in the United States Army. His career with Besser started in the machine shop in 1951, advancing through many facets: assembly, estimating, storeroom and finally stores and inventory control, and in 1962 he was appointed production planning manager. He was named manager, material control in 1969.

George and his wife, Audrey, raised 12 children. In Alpena, one of their daughters, Janet Behnke is the current safety and training supervisor at Besser and son Gary Stevens is the operations manager. George's brothers Levi and John also worked for Besser, Levi as a machinist in the shop and John was a service representative who traveled extensively installing Besser machinery in Russia, Japan, China and many other countries.

When Phil Park was looking to find a manager for Besser operations in Roanoke, Illinois, George was appointed to president of the operation. An additional assignment when George would take Bes-Air to the Peoria Airport was to secure Illinois corn to feed the deer at KMP Klub. George would also help prepare for customer visits at the Klub by securing the alcohol. After all, prices for such beverages were somewhat lower in Illinois than Michigan!

George played an active role in the community as member of the Alpena Boosters working at many of their fundraisers as well as soliciting funds and materials for various Babe Ruth and Little League baseball fields. In recognition of his Boosters efforts, the Babe Ruth field in the OxBow area was named Stevens Field. Since then, the field has been reestablished as McRae Park. In 1995, George was inducted in the Alpena Sports Hall of Fame as an outstanding community sports booster.

JAMES C. PARK TAKES THE HELM

Jim was destined to run Besser Company like his father and great-uncle; the concrete block machine business ran in his blood. However, Jim wanted to bring a unique and diverse leadership to the position. He felt he wanted to learn not just the concrete industry, but also to cultivate experience from different jobs, companies and countries. After graduating from Alpena High School, he completed his undergraduate studies at the University of Mexico and University of Michigan. Prior to completing his master of business administration from the



Jim in high school.



Jim Park returns from Mexico after having visited Cuba and several other countries.



Philip Scott and Kimberly Alison, children of Jim and Sally Park born in Caracas, Venezuela while Jim was assigned there by Price Waterhouse and Company.

University of Michigan, Jim spent a year as a Rotary International Fellow in Caracas, Venezuela. Toward the end of his military career in the Army Security Agency, he took graduate classes at George Washington University while stationed at Ft. Meade Maryland with the National Security Agency during the Berlin Crisis of 1960-1961. After completing his graduate work in 1961, Jim was hired by Price Waterhouse and Company in Caracas, Venezuela as a data processing specialist and was promoted to consultant while in the Washington, D.C. office and finally to manager in the Tampa, Florida office.

ADMINISTRATIVE CHANGES

There were several administrative position changes taking place at Besser in 1977. While the majority of the equity in Besser was still family

owned, a professional management team was being developed. Jack Mitchell was made distribution manager for the United States. Jack started at Besser in July 1940 as a sales and service trainee, then traveled throughout the U.S. and Mexico as a service representative and then served in many sales and service manager positions for the New York districts prior to his promotion.

Karl Nensewitz became sales manager in 1977. Since his arrival at Besser Company in June 1941, Karl had evolved into one of the most prominent figures in the concrete machine industry. After serving in many capacities—including the first manager of the Besser Research and Training school—Karl was appointed director of Besser Technical Center and in 1965 became the service manager for Besser Company until his promotion to sales manager.

Michael J. Kelly started with Besser in January 1972 as a management trainee, working in many shop areas as well as in production office departments. In 1982, he was promoted to assistant plant manager under Eldon Thompson, plant manager. In 1985, Mike was promoted to vice president, manufacturing and on to executive vice president of Besser Alpena manufacturing in 1999. During his career with Besser Company he also served the community in various positions including the Junior Achievement program. Mike concluded his career with Besser in 2001.



1990 Board of Directors. Left to right: Edward Turner, Jim Park, Richard Muzzy, Harold Reumenapp, Jim Arbuckle, Carl Reitz.

DAVID FUNK

David Funk started at Besser in January 1947 at a wage of 85 cents an hour as an office clerk, although many said he was overpaid at that rate! In January 1954 he was promoted to a salaried position, overseeing the parts order department called central order, and opening additional warehouses under the supervision of Joe Pinson. The new warehouses were strategically located in: Bramalea, Ontario, Canada; Chamblee, Georgia; Kansas City, Missouri and Chatsworth, California. The Chatsworth warehouse showcased the uses of concrete masonry, and also housed an ultra-modern office to serve west coast and overseas customers. Weekly parts shipments were trucked from Alpena to replenish warehouse inventory. David retired in February 1986 as customer service manager.

JACK MITCHELL

Jack Mitchell, born and raised in Alpena, graduated from Alpena High School in 1940. Following graduation he began his career with Besser Company working in the shop. In December 1943, he joined the Army and was assigned to the 8th Armored Division. He was awarded the Silver Star for his service in the military.

In January 1946 he returned to Besser Company as a senior layout man in the shop. Following his training in 1948 through 1950, he was promoted to a serviceman on the road.

In 1954, he transferred to sales for the Buffalo, New York district receiving promotions until in 1976 he received his highest promotion, that of distribution manager, a position he held until his retirement in 1984. Jack has a son, Karl, who has worked for Besser Company for 35 years, with most of that time spent in the pricing department.

HYDRAULIC BLOCK MACHINES

The concrete block machine industry had grown exponentially since the first Besser hand-tamp machine was introduced in 1904. Many companies making concrete block machinery had come and gone, unable to meet the difficult challenges that Besser Company had survived. In its first 75 years of existence, Besser Company produced and installed more than 450 machines around the world, catapulting it to world leader status. Still there was competition from hydraulic block machines that operated more quietly and took up less space. Hydraulic machines filled the demand for smaller producers with fewer assets. To meet this industry need, a moderately priced hydraulic machine was introduced shortly after Mr. Besser's death. The first version was called a V2H — "V" for Vibrapac®, "2" for two-at-a-time and "H" for hydraulic —and still featured the durable mechanical design and vibration originally established by Jesse Besser. A subsequent hydraulic three-at-a-time machine with a curvilinear feed box design engineered by Mike Balhorn in 1977 was called the Bescopac®, which produced approximately 8640 block per day and replaced the V2H. Also in 1977, another new and updated model of the Vibrapac was introduced, named the Dynapac® and capable of producing 1800 block per ten-hour day, 3-at-a-time in 8 inch equivalents.

AN ERA ENDS ... AND BEGINS

The company flourished under the leadership of Jim Park, the young managers working with him, and the guidance of Phil Park and his associates. When a recession began in 1975, the company once again had to prepare



Phil as CEO of Besser Company.

itself for a setback. With the exception of Phil, no one in the Besser administrative team had any experience operating in an economic downturn. Phil had learned during the harsh depression of the 1930s that the possibility of another such crisis was both frightening and testing. Under the leadership of Phil Park, Besser Company survived the crisis.

Tragically, that couldn't be said about Phil himself. On 1 September 1983, while on his nightly swim behind his home on Lake Huron, Phil Park drowned.

Following the sudden death of his father, Jim was faced with many decisions regarding investments to improve Besser Company's response to increased competition. The communications system was upgraded with an entirely new phone and fax system. Computers were purchased for most employees, bringing the engineering department into modern times with CAD/CAM systems. As business began to improve, major shop improvements were made as well.

In January 1982, a new Lodge &

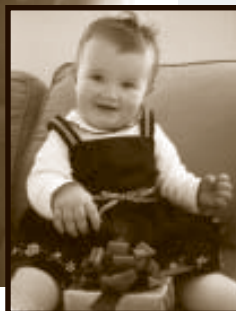
Shipley ProFiturn 50 CNC-Controlled Lathe was purchased for \$320,000. In May 1985, computerized numerically controlled panels on 3 Giddings and Lewis machining

centers were installed at a cost of \$255,000. Other major improvements followed. April 1986 saw a new Linde CM-350 thermal cutting machine installed for \$200,000, and in August new furnaces in heat treat at a cost of \$500,000 were put in place. Other physical improvements included the addition of a crane-way in the shop area and the enclosing of most of the cold storage area. To improve productivity of attachments and mold parts, a portion of the shop located between the main shop and heat treat was enclosed and new equipment was purchased for this core cell department.

E. Maxine Park, Phil Park's wife, died 13 February 1986 in Atlanta, Georgia following a brief illness. She had moved to Atlanta from Sun City, Florida to be closer to her eldest daughter Patricia. Born January 1911 in Olivet, Michigan, the former Maxine Bradley graduated from Olivet College. She taught Latin and English in the Alpena Public Schools for many years and was a very active member of the First Congregational Church. Other civic involvements and memberships included the Alpena General Hospital Tray Club where she served as president, fundraising for community concerts, plus many years of service as a "Grey Lady," or patient advocate, at the hospital. A rose garden was planted adjacent to Besser Company in honor of her many years of company and community service.



Pictured here in Alpena, 2002, are siblings Patricia, Jim and Susan.



Left to right: Alison Park with Sarah, Scott Park with Hallie, Dennis Fitzgerald with Michael and Kim Park. Inset: Molly Fitzgerald.

GERALD "FEENEY" KRUEGER

Gerald "Feeney" Krueger began his career with Besser Company in 1946 as a "time keeper" and soon was transferred to the accounting department as a clerk. He was subsequently appointed to personnel manager, the position he held until his retirement in 1987. "Feeney," as most Besser employees called him, had excellent negotiation skills and successfully reached agreeable settlements between Besser Company and the unions in most cases. He also operated the company store along with Al Liske and Irv Christopherson. Inside the store they sold pop, coffee, candy bars and safety shoes. Started in 1944, the store was open during the ten-minute breaks employees took each morning and afternoon. When the ten-minute breaks were eliminated, vending machines replaced the store.

Prior to his time with Besser Company, Feeney worked for Wyandotte Chemicals. When the company had their annual layoff, he joined the United States Navy and served through November 1945.

Feeney, along with Joe Pinson and Besser Company, founded the Besser Credit Union. Besser Company allocated a small area of the personnel department to be used as the credit union for a few hours a day. Al Siegert, who at the time worked in the personnel department, also ran the credit union office.

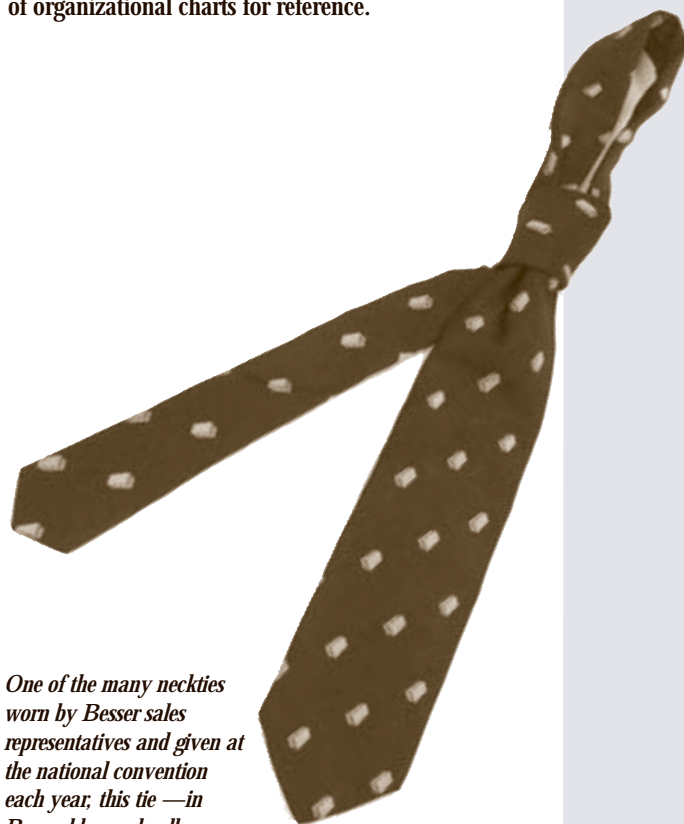
During his career at Besser he served the community in many ways. In 1968 he was chairman of the Alpena Community College Business and Industry Scholarship Committee. He was appointed to a five-year term on the Alpena General Hospital Board of Directors, and was also elected president of the Northern Michigan Personnel Association.

He has two sons currently employed by Besser Company: Jim is director of corporate purchasing and Mark is a technician in the heat treat department.

BESSER PRODUCT LINE EXPANSION

Once Jim Park became CEO, like his father he wanted to do something for the employees of the company. As business became profitable, he reinstated the tradition of company picnics. In addition, he wanted to show employees appreciation for their years of service. In 1989, Besser began awarding retirees with Accutron wristwatches engraved with their name and years of service. To date over 200 watches have been presented.

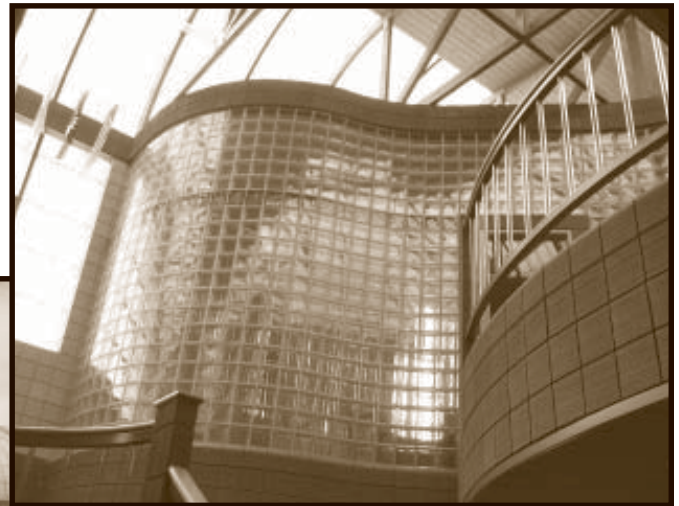
One of the new trends taking place in the concrete products industry was the buying up of small family owned block plants by large overseas corporations. Jim took a keen interest in learning who the new owners were and had this information collected in a wealth of organizational charts for reference.



One of the many neckties worn by Besser sales representatives and given at the national convention each year; this tie—in Besser blue and yellow—features little block.

NEW WORLD HEADQUARTERS BUILDING

The new Besser World Headquarters building was dedicated on 15 August 1986. The 24,000 square foot building utilizes concrete masonry units in innovative and striking ways, and provides an attractive, comfortable place for people to use their creative talents to improve the concrete products industry. This improvement allowed 19,000 square feet of previous office space to now be utilized as manufacturing space.



Many styles of concrete masonry units combine with other materials to create an attractive facility.

The cornerstone was placed by Jim Park and John Heslip, NCMA president.



Flags of all the countries where Besser equipment operate decorate the atrium.

ALFRED KARL NENSEWITZ

Born and raised in Alpena, Alfred was known to his friends as “Karl”. He graduated from Alpena High School in 1941 and immediately started at Besser as a milling machine operator that June. In 1942, he left to join the Navy for four years. Karl returned in 1946, and over the next three years he worked his way up to engineering development—tile machines, at Plant #3 (situated near the cement plant which today is Lafarge; Plants #1 and #2, located on US-23 South, made parts for Besser equipment).

In 1951, Karl became manager of Plant #3, manufacturing the Besser roof tile machine, the pallet cleaning machine and numerous small parts for Besser machinery.

Four years later, Karl became director of the Besser School for blockmakers and block users. Karl recalled one of the highlights of his Besser career was when Jesse Besser handed him a check for one million dollars to be delivered to Russell Wilson, superintendent of Alpena Public Schools, for the building of the Besser Technical Center. Karl was also actively involved in the design of that building.

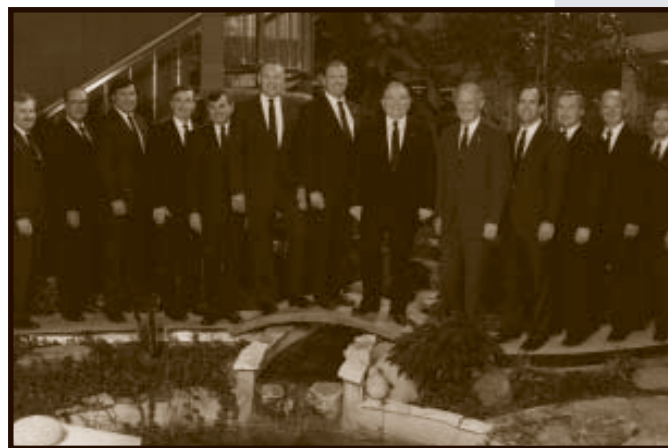
Moving up to the position of Besser Technical Center manager, he spoke at NCMA meetings as well as to state and local associations on the proper manufacturing and use of concrete masonry. He also served on technical committees of NCMA, ASTM, ACI and others.

In March 1965, he was appointed service manager. At the same time, Jack Mitchell was made sales manager, Earl Fraser advertising manager and Lucas Pfeiffenberger became manager of Besser Technical Center. More changes came in December 1976 when Karl was appointed sales manager, Mitchell was made distribution manager, Phil Park was chairman of the board, Jim Park, president and “Woody” Woodruff was senior vice-president.

Karl held his commercial pilot’s license, so in addition to his regular Besser job, he did some substitute co-pilot flying on Bes-Air. His last title with Besser was director of engineering when he retired July 1980.



*Besser Company picnics that Jim Park reinstated.
Top photo, 1992, photo above 1995.*



Besser Company 1991 management staff. Left to right: Cal Maynard, Dennis Rabeau, Ed Hickok, Stan Mazany, Jere Doyle, Walt Johnson, Mike Kelly, Jim Arbuckle, Jim Park, Kevin Curtis, Jeff Wallace, Tom Salts and Steve Malek.



Jim Park with Besser agent Tad Kashiwa sign an order with Kokasaku Block Company, the Enomoto brothers in Kangawa, Japan.

Posing in front of masonry high-rise buildings are: Jim Park, Carlos Taulil and Gilberto Glasser in San Paulo, Brazil.



JIM PARK ACHIEVEMENTS

As CEO of Besser Company, Jim continued to see the Besser Family of Companies grow. Appco, in San Antonio, Texas, specializing in designing and manufacturing aggregate handling equipment, became part of the Besser family in 1988. In 1994 Besser Baker opened a plant in Oscoda, Michigan at the former U.S. Air Force base to manufacture electrical panels under the name Oscoda Engineering and Manufacturing (OEM). The secrets to success in all of these combinations, in addition to the synergy of equipment and common customer base, were the Besser team of key managers at each location. Between three and twelve key managers received stock or equity in the parent company Besser Company. This technique provided an incentive for those managers at each location to lead the growth in sales and earnings due to the potential for growth in value of the individual's stock.

As the use of concrete paving stone began to grow, Besser management saw the need to offer a German-style paving stone machine. In order to supply this to the marketplace, the company joined forces with a bankrupt German paving stone equipment manufacturer in Lauffen Am Neckar. Much time and effort went into attempting to make machinery in a not very business-friendly situation of high wages, short working hours and difficult facilities. After a few years, management realized the venture was not in the best interest of Besser customers and employees and steps were taken to discontinue the relationship.

In April 1995, Besser combined forces with Lithibar-Matik in Holland, Michigan, a major manufacturer of cubers and related equipment. Besser also combined forces with Proneq located in Montreal, Quebec, Canada in March 1995. Proneq designs and manufactures specialty molds and components. A major step forward occurred in June 1998 when International Pipe Machinery Corporation of Sioux City and Quinn of Boone, Iowa, merged with Besser. The most recent addition to the Besser family in 2001, was Concrete Mold Components (CMC) of Compton, California, producers of high-quality, dimensionally precise molds for concrete products.

JAMES E. ARBUCKLE

James E. Arbuckle earned his associates degree at Alpena Community College in 1959, and in 1962 he graduated from Wayne State University with a bachelor of arts degree in business administration, majoring in accounting. He worked for a CPA firm in Detroit, Baditor and Segroves, and then returned to Alpena in 1967 as senior accountant for Reitz and LaFleche, a CPA firm.

Jim came to Besser Company in July 1967. He started as controller under the direction of treasurer Don Hampton and eventually became chief financial officer for Besser operations worldwide. He was elected to the Besser Board of Directors in 1984 and served as vice-chairman, executive vice president and president.

He was instrumental in the merging of resources with several manufacturing sites that became part of the Besser family at that time. They are Roanoke Industries in Illinois; Besser Canada Ltd. in Toronto; Appco in Texas, Lithibar-Matik in Holland, Michigan; Proneq in Montreal; Concrete Mold Components in California and International Pipe Machinery Corporation in Iowa.

He was a driving force and very active in many community organizations, including the Alpena Community College Foundation, Rotary Club of Alpena (past president), the Alpena General Hospital Board, the Jesse Besser Museum Board and the Besser Chorus, of which he is the current director. Jim is also an active member of the First Presbyterian Church. Jim retired from Besser Company in November 2003.

SIOUX CITY AND BOONE OPERATIONS

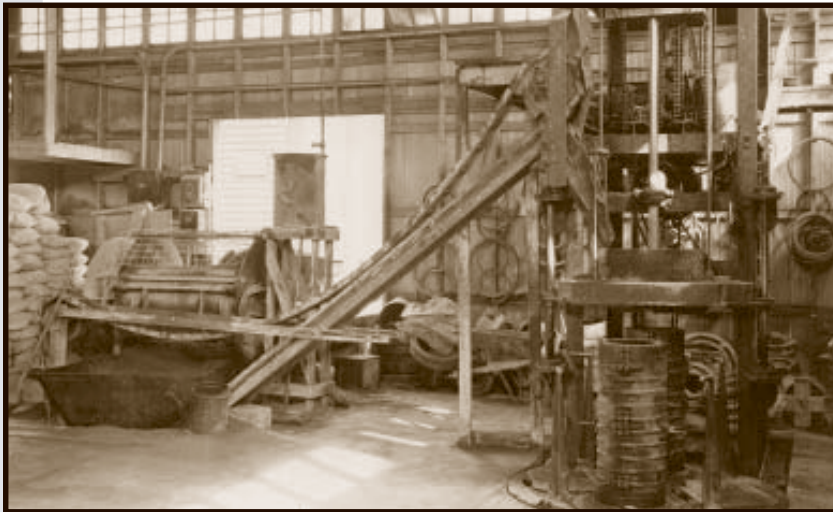
Both “McCracken” and “Quinn” are trade names associated with the concrete pipe and precast products industry since the early 1900s.

Iowan William McCracken, along with father-son team C.J. and C.C. Quinn, were pioneers in producing concrete pipe-making machinery. The Quinns developed one of the first concrete drain tile machines around 1906 to assist local farmers in irrigating their fields. William McCracken followed suit with a similar machine in 1909. In 1916-17 the companies, again acting independently, began building the first packerhead pipe machines, thereby introducing a productive and economical method for making concrete pipe for use in storm and sanitary sewers as well as irrigation projects.

International Pipe Machinery Corp. had its origins in the early 1980s. This was accomplished through the acquisition of the assets of Concrete Pipe Machinery Company of Sioux City, Iowa in 1983; the assets of



*Early McCracken
Model E pipe machine
producing bell down
concrete pipe.*



McCracken Model R pipe machine dating from the 1950s being fed by a mixer and drag link conveyor.

Quinn Foundry and Machine Division of Zeidlers, Inc., of Boone, Iowa in 1985; and the assets of Hydrotile Machinery Co., Nashua, Iowa in 1991.

In July of 1998, International Pipe Machinery Corp. joined forces with Besser Company. Since the process of moving aggregate, sand, cement and water to form concrete pipe was so similar to the process of making concrete block, it was natural that the pipe machinery fit in the Besser product line.

At the Sioux City location, the emphasis is on the manufacture of concrete pipe-making machinery, including Bidirectional (pipe machines equipped with the patented Bidirectional Rollerhead System), packerhead and vibration machinery for the production of concrete pipe in diameters from 4" through 156" (100 mm - 4000 mm). This location also supplies associated equipment such as pipe testers, mixers, cage expanders, and offbearing systems plus spare and wearing parts. The staff can also provide engineering and technical assistance for the establishment of a complete concrete pipe-making facility anywhere in the world.

Other key products include VIBRO-MAC and HYDROPAK dry cast machines, which are versatile, high production systems to produce a wide variety of shapes, sizes and types of concrete products. Vibrating table systems are also marketed to make unlimited precast product shapes.

The location boasts a fully equipped machine and fabrication shop, which is also used for contract fabrication and machining work. In addition, they produce pavement profile readers to measure highway smoothness and ride-ability.

In 1993, a research and development facility was built for research and testing of pipe and products equipment. This building has its own mixing and batching capabilities, and is the only facility of its kind in North America.



Job site view of a large-bore concrete pipeline in an open trench installation.



Rings manufactured at Besser in Boone, Iowa.

This Sioux City company has been exporting since 1926. Prior to becoming International Pipe Machinery Corp. (IPMC) the company received an "E" Award in 1965 and an "E" Star Award in 1970. After becoming IPMC, this location received the President's "E" Award for excellence in exporting in 1993.



The foundry in Boone, Iowa, has been pouring castings for the concrete pipe and precast industries since 1907.

At the Boone location, emphasis is placed on manufacturing rugged, durable wet cast and machine form equipment for precasters and pipe producers. Wet cast forms can produce virtually any size or shape of product, and they can be custom-made to meet producer specifications. Typical of the Boone line are forms for flared-end sections, manhole products, catch basins, grade rings and utility boxes.

Boone operates a modern foundry. With a large inventory of patterns and a complete pattern shop, Boone can offer shapes for most joint designs used in the industry today. In addition to caps and pallets for pipe and precast use, the foundry also specializes in commercial contract castings for a variety of job applications. The Boone shop is equipped to machine castings up to 200" (5100 mm) in diameter, including such shapes as round, arch and elliptical. An in-house metal laboratory assures product quality.

AWARDS

Jim Park received three of the highest awards a citizen of Alpena can garner. In 1999 the Alpena Chamber of Commerce chose him as Alpena Citizen of the Year. The inscription on the plaque reads, *"For doing things that others would not do, could not do, or didn't find the time to do to make our community a better place to live."* As of 2004, he is one of only eighteen residents to receive this award for continued contributions to the community.

Jim was inducted into the Alpena High School Alumni Hall of Fame in October 2003. This award recognizes Alpena High alumni who have attained excellence in the career of their choice. The past nine recipients included a bishop, an actor, a basketball coach, a general in the Air Force and several prominent business people. Jim was recognized as having been a campus leader in scholarship, clubs and sports while in high school.



The commitment to safety is strong throughout the company. Here employees at the Sioux City location pose proudly in front of the sign proclaiming their incredible safety record.

and at the University of Michigan, and for proceeding to a successful business career, taking the corporate headquarters of Besser to international prominence.

Earlier, Jim was inducted into the Alpena Sports Hall of Fame in 1995. The group recognizes athletes who have excelled locally and statewide in their particular sport.

Jim joins the following former Besser employees in the Hall of Fame: John “Wes” Craighead, Alvin Kelly, Tom DeCaire, Bob Rohn, Ray LaCross, Don Scheulke, John “Biff” Stepaniak, Joe Gapczynski, Cam Jury, Harry “Hi” Bott, Robert “Bob” Hastie and a newcomer in 2004, Claude Nensewitz. Al Henderson, Tom DeCaire and George Stevens who are Besser retirees have been honored by the Alpena Sports Hall of Fame for their continuous support of athletics with time and effort in the community.

Jim was selected based on his lifelong interest in several sports. While in high school he lettered in four sports and continued in both basketball and football at the University of Michigan until an injury shortened his career there. His love of tennis led him to continue playing to a mature age, and with a good doubles partner, he won the city championship in 1987 and 1988, plus a bronze medal at the Senior Olympics in Baton Rouge, Louisiana in 2001.

In addition to his personal athletic accomplishments, Jim has been a proponent and financial supporter of local institutions, including sports facilities. For example, when Alpena Community College made a significant campus addition, the Park Recreation Fund was instrumental in financing the field house which is used for sports events and graduations. This facility was named “Park Arena” in honor of the Park family. He was also key in the



Park family in Mexico. Back, left to right: Patricia Gardner, Bradley Gardner, Jim Park, Jerry Gardner, Susan Krausen, Tony Krausen. Front: Ida Gardner, Anita Gardner, Allison Krausen.

formation of Thunder Bay Recreation Center, a multipurpose facility for tennis, fitness training, basketball, volleyball and more, which opened in August 1999. In 2003, the Northern Lights Ice Arena opened adjoining the Thunder Bay Recreation Center.



Sports Hall of Fame plaque.



Jim developed his love of football at a young age.



The idea for this community events center with two sheets of ice was born in 1993 when Jim helped inspire a group headed by Tom VanMassenhove to raise funds for construction. Directly next to the community events center and recreation center, Jim also made sure that property was made available on which DeVere Construction developed several soccer fields in memory of Hazel Crittenden, wife of Bruce “Red” Crittenden, founder of the successful DeVere Construction Company in Alpena.



Detail of Thunder Bay Recreation Center driveway.



Northern Lights Ice Arena

THE WORLD CENTER FOR CONCRETE TECHNOLOGY

In 1984, the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges recognized the Blockmakers Workshops® program with a Community College/Industry Partnership Award, accepted by the presidents of both Alpena Community College (ACC) and Besser Company, Dr. Charles Donnelly and Jim Park. The award addressed not only the innovation involved in offering the classes, but also the excellent cooperation apparent between education and industry.

August 2000 heralded the ribbon-cutting for the World Center for Concrete Technology (WCCT), an \$8 million research and educational facility located in Harris Hall on the ACC campus. This facility was built as a result of the partnerships between Besser and other concrete and concrete products industries, the State of Michigan, U.S. Department of Commerce EDA, U.S. Department of Agriculture and Alpena Community College.

The 42,360 sq. ft. concrete masonry building contains classrooms, a computer lab, a testing facility and a fully operational Besser-equipped concrete products production plant. Pipe Production Schools were recently added to WCCT's lineup to better address a wider scope of needs.

The mission of the WCCT is ambitious: “To meet the current and future challenges of the concrete and concrete related industries.” Having a resource completely dedicated to this pursuit is an exciting competitive edge for the entire global industry.

In keeping with this vision, the Partners Council, an advisory group of industry leaders, was established to provide insight and expertise regarding the ever-changing needs of the industry to ensure the WCCT remains on the cutting edge. Current members of the Partners Council represent the following organizations: Alpena Community College, Besser Company, Lafarge

100 YEARS



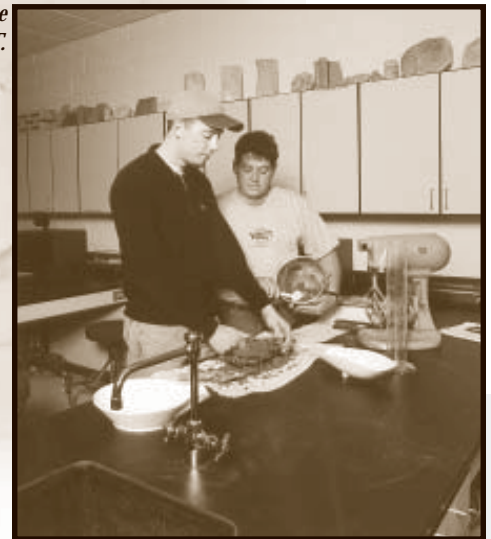
smarter and provide the science behind the production. Plus, with the advent of higher technology that allows a higher quality and a wider variety of products to be produced, producers must be able to meet challenges before they are presented. So, continuously examining and updating course offerings is absolutely essential. As one Workshop graduate stated, “When you’re running an older machine, you tend to do things the old way. I’ve learned quicker, easier and safer ways to do things in this class. It was awesome!”

Corporation, W.R. Grace, Rinker Materials Corporation, Master Builders and Oldcastle Architectural.

In 2003, Jim Hayford retired from his position as the facility’s first executive director, and Bob Eller and Eric Krebs, long-time instructors in the concrete industry, stepped into a shared leadership position to further expand the services of the WCCT. This will be accomplished by continuing to increase class and service offerings to various segments of the concrete industry, with a continuing focus on what has made the WCCT so unique: the ability to apply classroom learning with hands-on lab and plant experience. As one recent graduate of the Concrete Masonry Technology (CMT) session phrased it, “CMT is a unique combination of theoretical and practical applications—I have never seen anything like it!”

Bob and Eric are also keeping with the Jesse Besser original tenets for teaching, that to strengthen the industry the producers must be stronger, work

Students work in the lab at the WCCT.



In February 1993, the first Master Blockmakers® plaque was awarded. Pictured left to right: Jim Park, Besser CEO; Victor Funk, Amcon Block & Precast, Inc., St. Cloud, Minnesota; and Dr. Donald Newport, former president, Alpena Community College. Five out of the nine Blockmakers Workshops® courses must be completed in order to earn this recognition.



Kevin L. Curtis

CHAPTER FIVE: *The Future*



Kevin L. Curtis was born in Rogers City, Michigan and then moved to nearby Grand Lake. Growing up Kevin was very familiar with Besser Company because his father, Gailen, worked with Lucas Pfeifferberger and Bob Rohn at the research and training center.

When Kevin graduated from Posen High School in 1971, he went on to study business at Olivet College in Olivet, Michigan. He graduated from Phil Park's alma mater in 1975 and immediately began managing a hotel and restaurant complex in Flint, Michigan.

Kevin began his career at Besser Company as a management trainee in January 1978.

Early in his career the importance of promoting Besser parts was instilled in him by Phil Park. He was assigned to the

Minnesota district as a service engineer and five years later became a sales representative for the same district. It was during his time in the

field that Kevin discovered the value of forming solid relationships with customers built on mutual trust.

These relationships gave him insight into the specific needs of customers and enhanced his ability to provide exactly what they needed—whether service, parts or capital equipment.





The ability to provide “turnkey” service for the concrete products industry was made possible with the formation of Besser/DeVere in 1998. The primary benefit lies in a single source being responsible for the completion of the entire project, from equipment layout and building/site design to equipment installation and start-up. The joint venture Besser/DeVere handles project from conception to completion, provides project management and other expertise depending on the needs of each unique project.

Pictured left to right, at the grand opening of a turnkey plant in Colfax, North Carolina in 1999: Jim Krueger, Mike Hadley and Kevin Curtis of Besser Company; Tom Long and Terry Young of RMC Carolina Materials; Eric Larson and Don Denomme of DeVere Construction and Jeff Wallace of Besser Company.

Armed with the field perspective, Kevin came to Alpena as national sales manager in 1985. Once based in Alpena, Kevin was coached by Jim Park on the importance of consistency, continuous improvement and a focus on excellence. In 1993, he became vice president of sales and marketing, giving him responsibility for both national and international markets. He gained valuable customer insights through his extensive travels in Russia, China, India and South America. In 1999 he was appointed president of Besser Company, and was elected to Besser Board of Directors in October 2003.

Under Kevin’s leadership, the desire to excel as the industry’s preferred supplier of innovative equipment solutions, valuable services and excellent customer service intensified. In 2001 the transition from the Besser Family of Companies to a single company, Besser, began. During 2001 the names Appco, CMC, Lithibar, International Pipe Machinery, Proneq and Quinn started to disappear in the marketplace and the comprehensive product line was marketed as Besser. This timeframe also brought about a shift in management style; management by function was adopted to leverage the talents of Besser staff at all locations throughout the organization.

The Business Leadership Team was formed and given the responsibility to identify and integrate best practices, eliminate redundancies and maximize effectiveness and value to customers. At the same time four core company goals were identified: Innovative Products, Customer Satisfaction, Process Improvement and Financial Stability. Kevin has helped the company remain steadfastly focused on these goals.

The equipment and services introduced over the past several years are examples of the innovative products goal. The Advantage Series BiDi, EM Mixer, Vision 2 Pipe Machine Automation, Model MS-13 Besser-Matic, LSC-75 Rack Transporter Systems, new style utility box forms, the combination semi- and fully automatic cuber, and annual service agreements are all products that help producers in all industries Besser serves manufacture more efficiently.



Rapport Leadership Training

Kevin embarked on a unique leadership journey at the invitation of Dave and Carol Orton (partners with Lonnie and Jane Hanson, one of Kevin’s first Minnesota customers). The experience dramatically changed how he lives his life. Rapport Leadership courses are unlike typical training in that they “boldly stand as a powerful source for creative change.” The spirited training team is focused on developing leaders and building synergistic partnerships by delivering dynamic performance-based training and coaching with passion, conviction, courage, and integrity. Graduates live by the motto, “JFDI,” which means Just Focus and Do It. It was after this training that the management style at Besser shifted from a typical top-down approach to management by function. The company believes so strongly in the merits of this training that the number of Besser attendees continues to grow.

Each employee is involved with customer satisfaction and is aware of its incredible importance. Making Besser a better partner to producers is a goal that the staff is committed to for the next 100 years.

The dedication Besser has to the dynamic associations that support the concrete products industry is unmatched. Beyond financial support, the Besser staff serve on committees and lend their expertise where needed. By exhibiting at the Manufactured Concrete Products Expo, the annual trade show sponsored by the American Concrete Pipe Association, the Interlocking Concrete Paver Institute, the National Concrete Masonry Association and the National Precast Concrete Association, Besser is supporting the mission of each association while benefiting from a targeted audience interested in producing quality concrete masonry, pavers, retaining wall units, precast and pipe. Besser places tremendous value on the marketing program, especially in the field and the unique opportunities that trade shows provide.

Process improvement is another goal. Besser has adopted “Lean” principles to guide efforts. “Lean” simply means is to follow the most timely, cost-effective and simple way to get work done and to make sure that the right parts are available when customers need them. It means allowing the people closest to the job at hand to make decisions regarding work. Besser staff is just getting started on this company-wide effort which will continue to improve customer service.

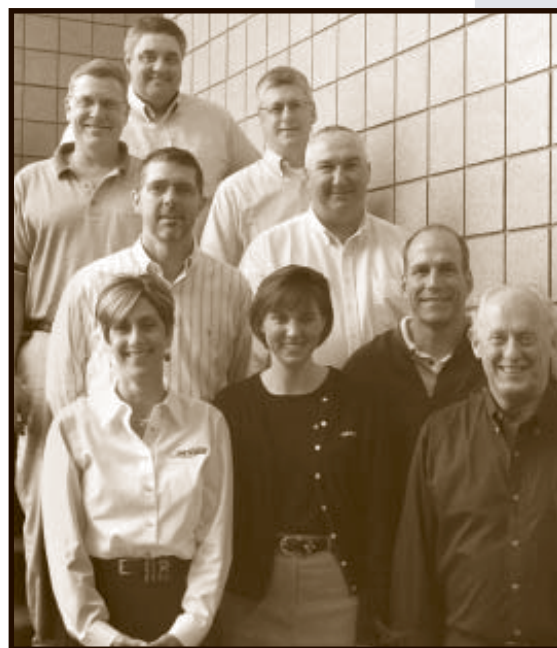
The key to reaching these goals is financial stability reached through a disciplined approach to managing financial resources. Leveraging buying power, streamlining processes, providing capital equipment financing options and investing wisely are just a few of the areas receiving attention.

Kevin is passionate about the company, customers and the industries that Besser is privileged to serve. Beyond his allegiance to Besser, Kevin has served on the Alpena Community College Technology Advisory Board, is a member of many National Concrete Masonry Association committees and is a director of Besser manufacturing sites located in Alpena, Sioux City, Holland and California. He serves as a member of the partners council of the World Center for Concrete Technology. Locally, he is an avid supporter of hockey, and has been treasurer of the Blue Line Club for many years.

Kevin resides in Alpena with his wife Paula. They enjoy outdoor activities with their two yellow Labrador Retrievers, Amber and Ruby. Their son Cory is a married attorney practicing in Colorado, while their son Alan is a graduate of Western Michigan University, doing his postgraduate work in archeology.

2004 MANAGEMENT TEAM

In the 1960s, the innovative move to elect outside directors encouraged the company to develop and hire professional managers. Professional executives, some developed internally and others who have already proven themselves in external careers, now manage Besser Company.



Business team leaders (clockwise from top): Joe Cercone, Tim Farley, Jeff Wallace, Kevin Curtis, Jim Park, Juli Musch, Terri Rondeau, Brock Mahler and Jim Krueger.

Today, leading Besser under the banner of one company are functional leaders for all manufacturing sites, and they are: manufacturing, Brock N. Mahler; engineering, Tim C. Farley; marketing, Jeff J. Wallace; personnel, Joe A. Cercone; finance, Juli S. Musch; purchasing, James A. Krueger; and communications, Terri B. Rondeau.

Operations managers for Besser manufacturing locations in 2004 are: Rene L. Bergeron, Montreal, Canada; Jon C. Dannenberg, Boone and Sioux City, Iowa; Larry M. Dutkiewicz, Holland, Michigan; Bradley L. Gardner (the only other family member employed at Besser and son of Patricia Park Gardner), Compton, California; Gary P. Stevens, Alpena, Michigan; Thomas J. Tullis, Boone, Iowa; and Ronald J. Walchek, San Antonio, Texas.



*Top row, left to right: Rene Bergeron, Jon Dannenberg.
Middle row, left to right: Larry Dutkiewicz, Bradley Gardner.
Bottom row, left to right: Gary Stevens, Thomas Tullis, Ronald Walchek.*

*2004 Board of Directors.
Front, left to right: Kevin Curtis, Jim Park, Back row, left to right: George Kuehn, Kimberly Park, Richard Muzzy, Jr. and Richard Lund.*



As Besser Company celebrates its 100th Anniversary in 2004, the key staff members of the policy team are the Besser Board of Directors: James C. Park, chairman and CEO; Kevin L. Curtis, president; and the four outside directors: George Kuehn, principal, Law Firm of Butzel Long, Detroit, Michigan; Richard A. Lund, president, Jedco, Inc., Grand Rapids, Michigan; Richard W. Muzzy, Jr., president and CEO, The Holland Group, Holland, Michigan; Kimberly A. Park (daughter of Jim Park), vice president, Managed Care Marketing, Merck & Co., Inc., West Point, Pennsylvania.

LOOKING AHEAD

Companies attaining 100 years in business will continue to survive as long as people with foresight are encouraged and promoted, product niches are discovered, and the product itself has added value to stay competitive in the market.

Besser employees took the company from vanishing lumbering industry to a newly developing industry of concrete block. Besser has expanded its focus, including a broad range of concrete products such as pipe, pavers, retaining wall units and precast. In the next century, Besser—with its strong leadership and foresight—will extend its legacy of recognizing developing opportunities and emerging markets.

OUR FUTURE IN CONCRETE

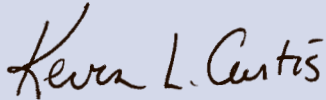
I am confident in the abilities of Besser employees, the entrepreneurial nature of our customers and the solid future of the industry we serve. I see a future bright with possibilities and am proud that we are riding on the forefront.

Our vision for the next 100 years is focused and clear: to provide innovative products and services that allow producers to improve their marketplace performance and expand the uses for concrete products machinery around the globe.

Besser employees are the keys to achieving this vision. We will continue to offer products and services that set industry standards for quality and durability. We will continue to actively listen to the marketplace, keeping abreast of competitive building materials and committing our time and talents to support our trade associations.

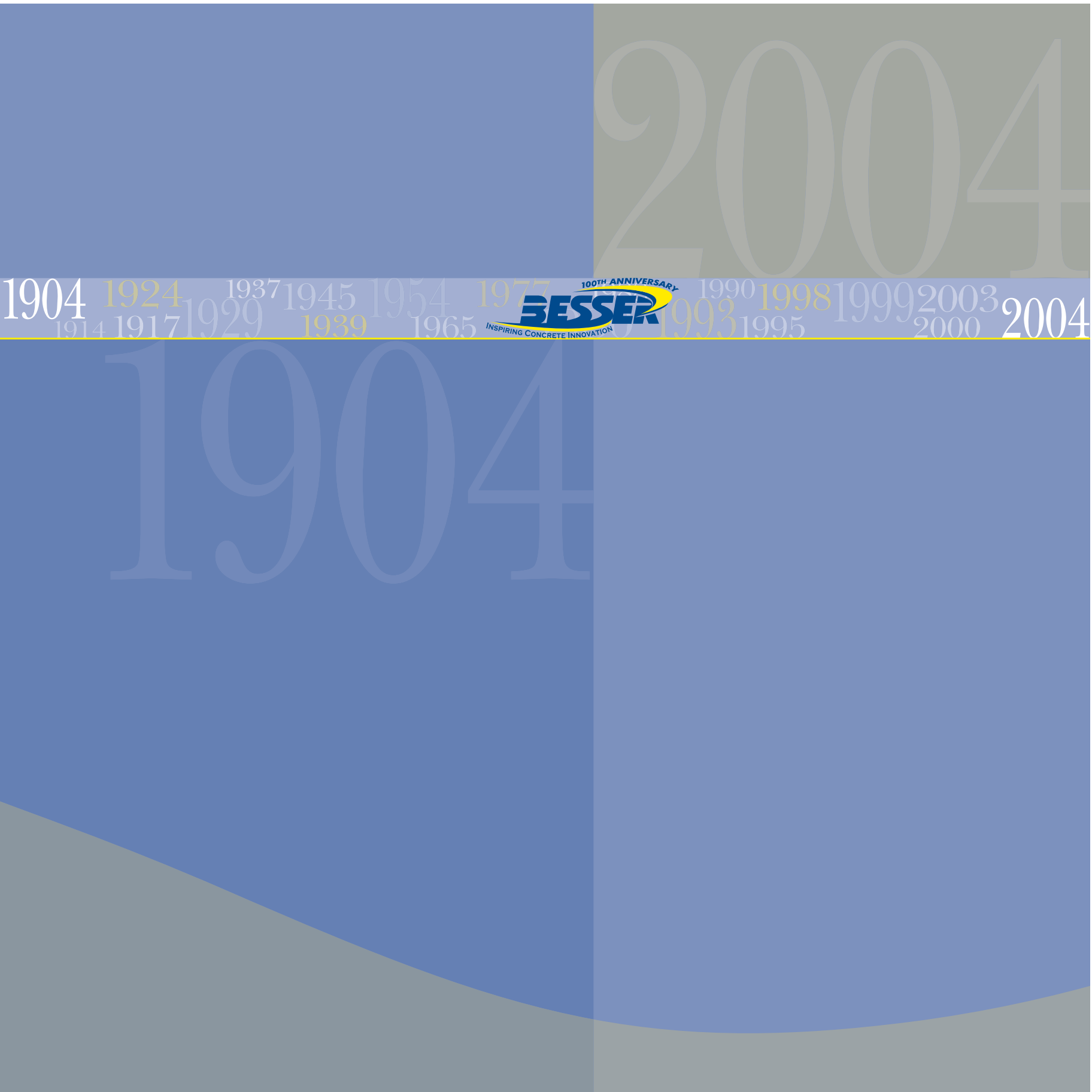
We are deeply committed to customer satisfaction. That means that we will faithfully provide technical expertise, award-winning education and training, genuine Besser parts, top-notch plant design assistance and high quality production systems to keep concrete products facilities producing at peak performance around the world. You can be confident that each and every day the Besser team is standing firmly beside you, ready to offer the support you need as you produce the concrete products that build our world.

Sincerely,



Kevin L. Curtis
President





1904 1914 1917 1924 1929 1937 1939 1945 1954 1965 1975 1990 1993 1995 1998 1999 2000 2003 2004

