

## NEWS / BUSINESS

## Schwartz Manufacturing marks 100 years, positions for growth under new leadership

By Alyssa Mitchell

**TWO RIVERS, Wis.** — Schwartz Manufacturing Co. — a fourth-generation, family-owned provider of filtration needs to the dairy industry — is marking 100 years in business.

Fourth-generation company owner and CEO Alessandra Schwartz is using her knowledge, along with the company's talented staff, to help customers meet their filtering needs. In 2016, the company named Ron Bruggeman president. Under his leadership, Schwartz Manufacturing is moving to a more data-driven decision-making model.

"The focus of the company right now is providing filtration products from the cow to the plant. We're filtering milk between the cow and the cooler, and filtering milk coming out of the bulk tank and into the dairy trucks, and then between the trucks and food processing plants," Bruggeman says.

"We make our own fabric here," he adds. "We start with fibers and convert that into a fabric, and we do it in a unique way. What we've created is specifically designed for the food industry. We design and manufacture our own products — like our Tuffy brand filters — and bring them forward in a way that others can't do."

Bruggeman notes his efforts largely have been focused around moving more to a data-driven decision-making model.

"My focus has been to ensure we're collecting the right data and using it to make the right decisions on what we do — either on the manufacturing side or for products in the marketplace," Bruggeman says.

"I've had the fortune of running small businesses in several different industries," he adds. "My background is mainly B2B. Regardless of the industry, there's a consistency in approach and the values you need in order to be successful."

Bruggeman says the lead has to come from the market and the customers.

"I have found over the years that if you ask people who their customer is, you get different answers. But for us here, the customer is the one who's using your product. If you focus on that person and use it to drive your decision-making, you will be successful. That is not to say that your channels partners don't matter. They do matter and are an important part of our success. But, you're hard-pressed to lose sight of what's important if you're connected to the people using your product," he says.

"The dairy industry is struggling through an extended period of very low milk prices. When you look around, you might think there's not an opportunity to grow. We don't believe that here. If you are driven to provide solutions for your customers, there will always be growth opportunities," Bruggeman says.

"We are committed to get more connected to our end users to get more input directly from them," he adds, noting this approach goes back to data-driven decision-making.

"For example, we're seeing more of a movement and concern relative to sanitary outcomes. So to support our customers, we sought 3-A compliance for our fabrics and products made from those fabrics," Bruggeman

notes. "We are now the only company that offers sanitary filters with 3-A Sanitary RPSCQC certification. It is this kind of reaction our customers expect from us.

"We're making sure where the industry goes — whether cheese plant or dairy farm — we continue to strengthen our knowledge of those businesses and adjust accordingly," he adds.

Bruggeman notes Schwartz Manufacturing's customers are asking the company to expand its product line when it comes to sanitary filters for the food processing industry.

"We're adding a product line extension this year to meet those needs," he says. "We currently produce products out of our own fabric as well as fabrics we buy on the marketplace. We're going to be expanding that product line in the next year."

The company has always been willing to adapt to new opportunities, he adds. Consistency in innovation and a willingness to change to meet customer needs have been key pillars of how Schwartz Manufacturing does business since its beginning, and that will continue as the company marks

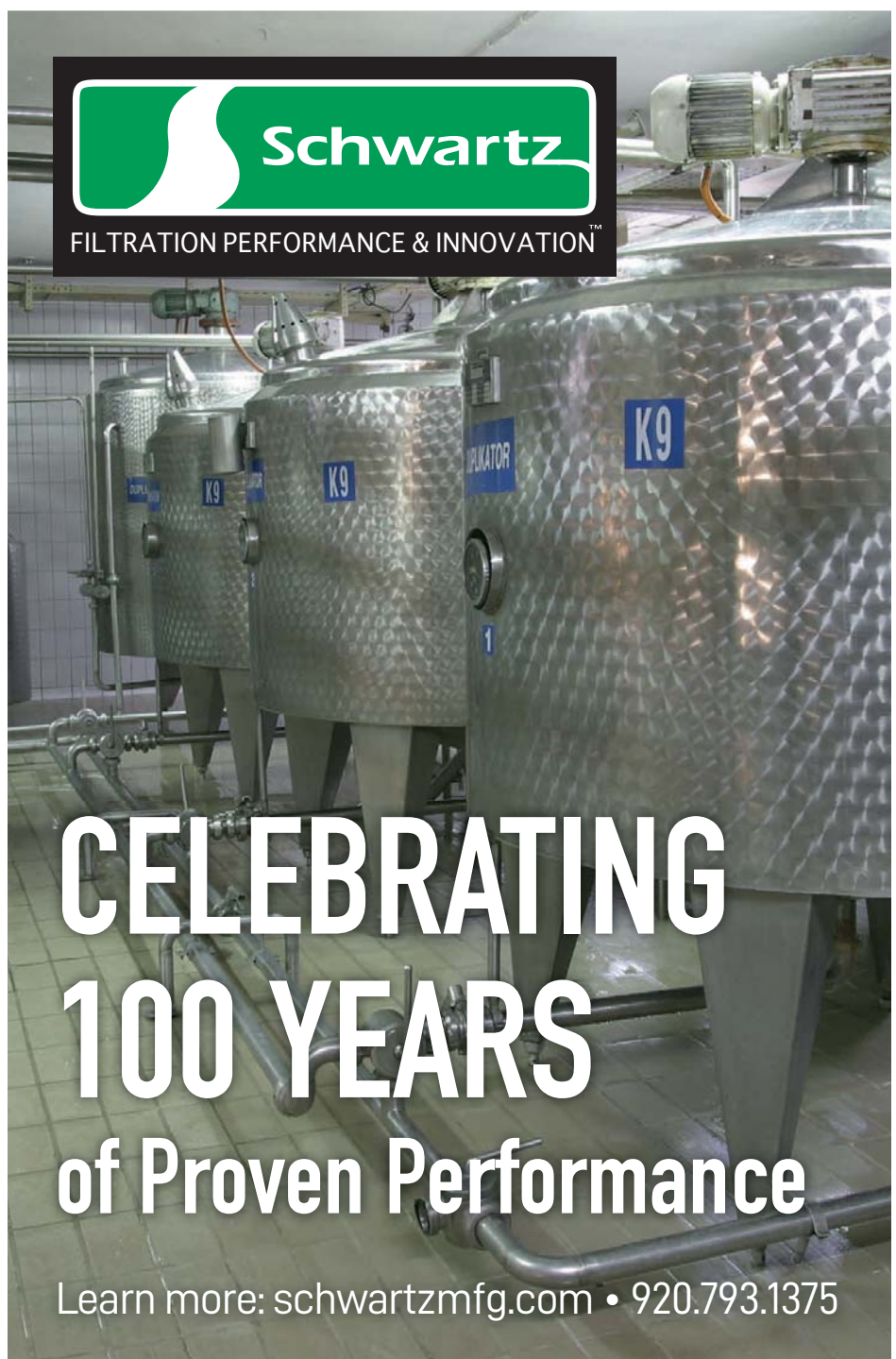
100 years and looks to the future, Bruggeman says.

"The commitment this company has to the customer and our community hasn't changed. If you become part of Schwartz Manufacturing, you realize it's been here 100 years because it's stayed true to what it believes — serving the customers and the community," he says. "This company lives that and believes that. We haven't lost sight of that — we may be innovative and introduce new products but we will always stay true to who we are and what we believe in."

Beyond that, Bruggeman says he will drive a continuous improvement mindset.

"I'm a strong believer in lean processes and striving to improve everyday," he says.

"We want to maintain and grow our position with dairy plants and processors and also look at leveraging our technology in additional markets," he adds. "I think there's an opportunity for Schwartz to become even more integral in the food business, and I look forward to moving in that direction." CMN



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