

## Richard Reinke to be Inducted into Neb. Business Hall of Fame

Written by hebronjournal

Tuesday, 27 January 2015 23:05 - Last Updated Tuesday, 03 February 2015 22:24

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On Feb. 5, Deshler's own Richard Reinke, founder of Reinke Manufacturing Company, will join the ranks of other great business leaders at the Nebraska Business Hall of Fame.

Reinke, now deceased, started inventing at a young age in his father's machine shop. Never finishing his education beyond eighth grade, Reinke grew into a self-taught, talented engineer and draftsman and introduced the world's first reversible, electric gear driven center pivot system, a self-propelled irrigation system that revolves around a pivot placed at a well or water source.

Other notable inventions credited to him are the first pivot with rubber tires, the first V-jack truss system and the first system with an internal flex-joint for hills.

He started manufacturing laminated arches on his family farm near Byron in 1954, and a couple years later moved the operation to Deshler. Since then Reinke Manufacturing Company has grown into one of the oldest and largest center pivot irrigation system manufacturers in the world.

Willis Kettelhut, former president of Reinke Manufacturing, started at the company only a few years after it was formed. He was one of four to five employees there at the time.

"I never had to write a resume because I always worked for Reinke," said Kettelhut, chuckling.

In the early days, Reinke mostly did construction and made laminated rafters. Kettelhut remembers long hours of constructing farm storage buildings, banks, commercial buildings, churches and house building projects all over the area.

Later, Reinke started doing business with the Olson Brothers. Reinke built 50 oil powered pivots for them; however, upon a post assessment of the performance in the field, Kettelhut, who was vice-president at the time, strongly urged Reinke to come up with a better design.

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“Richard said ‘are we going to keep building this?’ And I said ‘no way,’” said Kettelhut. “I wanted it to be electric [powered], have rubber tires, less towers and be higher off the ground.”

That design became the standard for pivots all around the world.

Reinke started designing the new system in 1967 and by 1968, his company was putting these pivots in the field.

“Everyone at that time thought ‘you can’t mix electricity with water,’” said Kettelhut. “But most competitors have followed that pattern now. It’s the standard. It’s state of the art.”

Gradually, Reinke Manufacturing shifted their attention away from building construction to focus solely on the irrigation business.

Reinke’s quick turnaround of the design was typical of him, according to Kettelhut.

“He was very active: a get-it-done type of person,” said Kettelhut. “He was always trying to invent something new.”

Today, Reinke Manufacturing lays claim to over 30 patents, many of them industry firsts.

Reinke was honored by the Nebraska Hall of Agricultural Achievement and the National Irrigation Association for pioneering innovations. He also received the National Award for Agricultural Excellence and served on the United Nations Board of Foreign Trade in the 1980’s.

The induction into the Hall of Fame will take place at the Cornhusker Marriott Hotel in Lincoln at

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7 p.m. as part of the Nebraska Chamber's annual meeting and evening program.

