

# Small Town Wisconsin Woman Opens Second Pieh Tool Store

by Karen Mahoney

Some of Amy Pieh's earliest memories include retrieving discarded hoof clippings and bent nails for her father, William Pieh, CEO of Centaur Forge, Ltd., after he shod a horse. It was commonplace to find her trailing her dad as he made his monthly trips to various racetracks in Illinois, selling blacksmithing and horse-shoeing supplies. During the annual July Sidewalk Days in her hometown of Burlington, Wisconsin, Amy and her siblings would set up a makeshift office on an old card table selling used horseshoes and horsenail rings; and later, in her teen years, she worked at Centaur after school, doing odd jobs to earn spending money.

After William passed away in 2000, Amy quit her job in California to assist her mother, Bonnie, in running the business. She learned shipping and receiving, and later, purchasing and website design. The business had suffered greatly with her father's illness, but after teaming up with her mother, Centaur was turning a profit again. Just before Bonnie's death in 2001, Amy was named Vice President of Centaur Forge, Ltd., but she thought her idea of continuing the legacy died with her mother.

"I really wanted to buy the business, but I had four siblings who wanted to sell, and I couldn't afford to buy it on my own without their help," she explained. "I didn't know what to do and started looking for a farrier business to buy."

Thankfully, Amy connected with SCORE, a nationwide nonprofit association dedicated to helping small businesses get off the ground and achieve their goals through education and mentorship. SCORE's Herndon, Virginia headquarters is celebrating its 50th anniversary and holds an exemplary record of helping small businesses get a start with free or low cost mentoring, counseling, workshops and other business tools. "They mentored me into writing a business plan to hopefully buy Centaur and later helped me look at a start up business or purchasing a farrier business," she said.

"A year after my mom's death, I had a day off from my job as an independent contractor for a nuclear power inspection company in Phoenix and decided to drive around the Sedona area. I was elated by the area! I knew that ABANA (Artist Blacksmith Association of North America) had a successful blacksmith conference here, so I



*The original Pieh Tool Company located in Camp Verde, Arizona, was opened in 2003.*

started doing research and felt that this was the perfect place to start my business."

After Centaur Forge sold, Amy moved to Camp Verde in 2003 and opened Pieh Tool Company to accommodate the growing need for Blacksmithing supplies. Because she couldn't use the Centaur Forge logo, she created her unique design to include the family's last name encircling the image of a Centaur. She created the company primarily as a mail-order business, the warehouse set up just as her Dad had done.

"It was my quiet way of saying that the 'real' Centaur was still here," she said. "I had a guy come into my shop recently who said he had bought supplies from Centaur Forge in 1970 and then, 35 years and 2000 miles later, he drove down the adjacent highway and saw the sign that said 'Pieh Tool Company,' and he wanted to see if there was a connection. He smiled, then told me that I wasn't there that day when he stopped in and purchased an anvil. That made me so happy!"

Opening Pieh Tool Company was cathartic for Amy as she mourned the loss of her parents who died within 18 months of each other and it also distracted her through the long months as she awaited the birth of her son, William.

"It was a way to heal and stay close to Mom and Dad because I got to hear about them all the time, and to say 'Thank you' to them," she explained. "When they died, I frequently reflected on my years with them. This business was one way I could show them what a positive influence they had had on my life."



*Pictured here is a student in the blacksmith class at the "Bill Pieh Resource for Metal Work."*



*The "workshop" available for educational classes and seminars.*





*Pieh Tool Company 2 has a great selection of farrier supplies, as well as apparel, books and educational DVDs.*



*Pieh Tool supplies horseshoers world-wide!*

Farrier and nationally known Artist Blacksmith, Gordon Williams, serves as a contracted blacksmith instructor, offering classes throughout the year at the Camp Verde location.

Amy carries her own line of "Top Shelf Standard" Pieh Legacy products, such as Pieh Legacy hammers and tongs. Popular with customers are the aptly named Billy tongs, Victory Forge Spring Swages, leather aprons, punches or Bonnie hoof knives and Pieh hoof nippers.

70% of Pieh Tool sales are from mail order, with sales coming from all areas of North America and the world - from far away as Australia, Poland, Finland, Ireland, New Zealand and South America. "The other 30 percent are locals who come from the county around us," said Amy. "If someone is driving across Arizona from any of the western states, they make a beeline and come to our store because no one sells what we sell. I have been told that there is no other store like ours."

After numerous requests to open another store to service the many farriers in the area, last March, Amy opened Pieh Tool Company 2 in Phoenix/Cave Creek, a 1600 square foot 'retail only' store, and it is now celebrating its one year anniversary! In celebration of this anniversary, and to thank all of their loyal customers, Pieh Tool is holding an Open House and Clinic on March 15 at the Cave Creek store.

Corporation Secretary and Catalog designer, Ann Illikainen, began working on the catalog and website design with Amy before the Camp Verde store opened.

"I loved to work on gathering data and creating the printed project," Ann explained. "To have been involved from the get-go and watching Amy's drive and determination to make Pieh Tool Company, the successful business it is today, makes me very proud to be part of the story. There were hard times and hurdles to cross, and just due to sheer determination, Amy made Pieh Tool bloom." Amy now employs six individuals between both stores.

Illikainen watched Pieh Tool grow over the years and appreciated Amy's foresight in developing the "Bill Pieh Resource for Metal Work," where renowned instructors offer various classes on blacksmithing, chasing and repousse, bladesmithing, coppersmithing and horseshoeing clinics. "Students come from several states including Alaska and Hawaii, as well as Canada, to attend the classes," Ann continued. "But Amy didn't stop when her 10-year anniversary milestone hit!"

Admittedly, Amy was surprised at the many requests to open the second location, and while she was concerned with opening a business



*Pieh Tool Company carries a variety of farrier supplies, including anvils, forges, power tools and tongs, along with a huge variety of horseshoes from all the leading distributors.*





Amy Pieh, founder of Pieh Tool Company and Pieh Tool Company 2.

in a shaky economy, the number of supporters encouraged her to take the risk.

"It was amazing, as I was getting at least three calls a day, for months, asking me to open another store near the Phoenix area," she explained. "The new retail store is doing tremendous! We offer a full array of professional horseshoeing supplies, including anvils, forges, Soft Ride boots for horses, Hoof Power Feed Supplement and LMF Feed. We are a distributor of top brands such as Delta Mustad, GE Forge & Tool, as well as Milwaukee Power Tools and JET / Powermatic Equipment. The store also offers books, instructional DVDs and blacksmithing supplies."

For Cave Creek Store Manager, Tania Martinez, who has six years experience working for another farrier supply store, the best part of working for Pieh Tool Company 2 is the customers: "There is always a lot of teasing, laughing and joking that goes on every day, but when there is someone who needs help or has a tragedy, they all become like family and help each other out," she said. "The customers are such good people, and we create a comfortable, friendly atmosphere here. They know that we are going to get the products that they need, when they need them."

By all accounts, the farriers were right in encouraging Amy as the Cave Creek location is thriving. "Friends and associates from outside the blacksmith/farrier industry are surprised a new business advanced so quickly," she said. "But farriers in the area needed a place to go. Over the years, I have seen many stores struggle and sadly close, so I put in long hours and continue to do all that I can to make my business work. I hope it continues."

Since March, Tania has helped Amy build the Cave Creek Store. From the beginning, she expected the business would be successful. "I knew this was a goldmine because there was another farrier store across the street, and when they moved, they left a big void," Tania said. "When Amy came in on this corner, I knew there would be no problem with sales."

Like her father, who was known for his jovial conversations with customers and suppliers, Amy also enjoys the social aspect of her work, talking with the farriers and blacksmiths about the business, especially those who share a connection with her late parents.

"Lots of people knew my Dad, and it is great to hear about him from customers who knew him well. I also love the variety of people and the opportunity to see all the different artists creating things from the equipment they bought from us," she said. "They might take a class, or start a new career or hobby, and it is interesting to hear what they are doing. I also very much enjoy attending tradeshow,

## PIEH TOOL COMPANY 2

### OPEN HOUSE & CLINIC

Saturday, March 15, 2014

#### Special Store Hours:

8:00 a.m. – 6:00 p.m.

Registration begins at 8:00 am

Seminar by Esco Buff on

Laminitis: 9:00 am - 4:30 pm

(Qualified for continuing education credits for AAEP/CAPF and Arizona Academy of Veterinary Practice)

#### Location:

28255 N. Tatum Blvd., Ste #1,  
Cave Creek, Arizona

#### Cost: FREE

(Includes coffee, donuts, and lunch)

Space is limited, so reserve  
your seats now.

Register before March 1  
and receive a free Hoof Knife!

Must register by March 12  
to guarantee lunch.

Phone: 888-743-4866

working on the website and on our annual catalog."

Future goals include opening a third store on the west side of Phoenix and a manufacturing business in Camp Verde where Amy would design more Pieh brand tools and oversee the quality of the tools produced.

"We would be able to offer more reliable quality and delivery if we produced our own tools, anvils and other Pieh Tool products in-house," she said. "I really enjoy all aspects of what I do, and I really hope that people will come in to the Cave Creek store and check out Pieh Tool Company 2, especially for our One Year Anniversary Open House."

You can visit the Pieh Tool Company Distribution Center at 661 E Howards Rd. #J Camp Verde, AZ 86322, phone 888-743-4866, or at their retail store, Pieh Tool Company 2, located at 28255 N Tatum Blvd #1, Cave Creek, AZ 85331, phone 480-626-0924. Please visit their website at [www.piehtoolco.com](http://www.piehtoolco.com). □

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10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

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Pieh Tool's 200+ page printed catalog is available at both stores and can be ordered by phone or online.



Pieh Tool Company also carries plastic horseshoes.

