

The stage is set for the Circle of Stars Gymnastics Invitational. With 4,500 participants over three days, it requires 10 truckloads of equipment.



FOR LOVE OF THE GYM

Setting a 'High Bar' For Performance

Address: 775 Scott Court
Madison, IN 47250
Telephone: (800) 876-3194
Web site: www.midwestgymsupply.com
Management: Paul Kemp, president and CEO

By Katie Coffin

At 75 years old, Paul Kemp identifies himself as “unsuccessfully retired.”

It’s impossible for him to completely disconnect from Midwest Gym Supply (MGS), the business he started in 1989. It’s grown into one of the largest athletic equipment suppliers in the country.

Most mornings, he goes to the office to make coffee and leave doughnuts for the employees, then spends the rest of the day on his horse farm. He oversees the decision making at MGS, but has handed the reins to his son, Chris. Another son, Nick, developed the web site and online sales. Daughter Stephanie owns and operates Madison Gymnastics World (MGW), the gym Kemp founded in 1981 that launched the family legacy.

Kemp shares his gymnastics history with a southern drawl, hinting at his Memphis, Tennessee roots. His love for gymnastics began as a child in a program offered at the YMCA. Later, when his daughter became interested in the sport, he visited several gyms but wasn’t satisfied with what she was learning.

“I borrowed about \$12,000 from the bank and bought \$6,000 worth of equipment. I leased a 7,500-square-foot building for \$3,000 and the rest is history,” he reflects. “We opened (MGW) in 1981, and in 1983 we placed in the Indiana state meet.”

As a coach and gym owner, Kemp became aware of the evolution of the sport – the gymnasts’ skill level was improving rapidly and the equipment had to keep up. For instance, the specifications on the distance between the women’s uneven bars was changing almost every year, necessitating all gyms in the U.S. to purchase new spreader bars.

“That would entail about a \$100 expense, and back in the ’80s that was a lot of money for a gym school,” Kemp recalls.

So Kemp designed and produced a telescopic spreader bar that could adjust to meet the changing specifications and sales soared. It was the initial product of what would become MGS, a company known for its innovation, industry expertise and first-rate customer service.

Equipping the best

Few sports allow athletes to display sheer strength, balance and precision like gymnastics. Whether a gymnast is flipping on the high bar, maneuvering the pommel horse or gracefully executing a floor routine, the spectacle is captivating.

While training and concentration are keys to success for athletes, a flawless performance also requires quality equipment. When he and his team first started, Kemp says the goal was to improve the equipment used in the industry to complement the gymnasts’ skills.

“In 1989, when we provided equipment for our first Indiana state gymnastics meet, we actually disassembled the floor and equipment at (MGW),” recalls Kemp when the original supplier for the state meet backed out at the last minute. “The equipment that was used at the state level was equipment we had manufactured for the Madison gym, and it was very well received by all the athletes and coaches in the state. We became the official supplier of the Indiana state meet equipment.”

Products that have shaped the business include:

- International Men’s ELITE™ Horizontal Bar: made of stainless steel and virtually indestructible, it allows athletes to perform the most rigorous routines
- Chalk Eater: the air filtration system takes chalk dust and other pollutants out of the air
- EVA top foam: padding the spring floors, it’s so resilient that one can dribble a bowling ball on it

“We were an innovator and a pioneer in the development of those components,” Kemp declares. “We tested (these products) over one whole competitive season to see if they were going to hold up and if it was going to promote a better surface to the gymnasts.”

Steady growth

MGS was one of the first equipment suppliers for state- and regional-level meets in the U.S., and now it is the preferred equipment supplier for USA Gymnastics Region 5 (Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Ohio and Kentucky).

Every aspect of the business is growing:

- 42,000 square feet of gym, production and storage space on eight acres
- 18 trailers for transporting equipment to meets across the region
- 18 employees including fabricators, in-house technicians, sales, event supervisors, installers and office staff
- 110 events equipped during the 2015-2016 season

“In 2007, we had about 65 gymnastics events that we supplied equipment for,” explains Mona Warner, office manager at MGS. “Last season was over 100. We acquired more warehouse space and added trucks to our fleet. I’m confident we will continue with that growth.”

Balancing act

Warner coordinates the equipment rental and makes sure the correct trailers arrive at the specified locations on time. Warehouse employees clean and load the equipment, and a fleet of drivers deliver it. “It’s quite a process,” she confirms.

Outside of Region 5, MGS has traveled to North Dakota, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, Missouri, Virginia and beyond. The farthest trip was for an event in Key West, Florida. “It was in December, and the weather was great,” Kemp says with a laugh.

One event that stands out is the Arnold Gymnastics Challenge in Columbus, Ohio,

on the phone and ask what it will take to make them happy,” Kemp affirms. “I think customer relations is one of the most important aspects of a business. You can’t do business if someone is mad at you.”

Joan DeVeau is a long-time customer who benefits from Kemp’s industry wisdom. DeVeau’s School of Gymnastics is a



In addition to the more than 100 events equipped during the competition season, the manufacturing and production shops continue work. “I would attribute the success of MGS to my family and to our employees,” Paul Kemp declares.



sponsored by Arnold Schwarzenegger. It’s part of the larger Arnold Sports Festival that features other sports like weight lifting, swimming, soccer and power tumbling. (Kemp has not met Schwarzenegger, but his sons have.)

MGS has also furnished equipment for the Buckeye Classic and the IGI Chicago Style Gymnastics Competition on Navy Pier for 20 years. Each event has thousands of entries and are among the largest gymnastics competitions in the U.S.

‘Perfect 10’ with customers

MGS does not allow for disgruntled customers.

“If I have a dissatisfied customer, I call them

Fishers-based gym that also hosts the Circle of Stars Gymnastics Invitational. The competition, which started as a one-day event in a high school gymnasium, has grown into one of the largest in the country. It attracts 4,500 participants throughout a three-day span. DeVeau is quick to acknowledge MGS has equipped and supported the event from the beginning.

“Paul has been the most loyal friend in the world,” DeVeau declares. “He’s always looking out for my best interest in terms of helping me to grow my gym. He’s always pushing me to reach the maximum potential my gym could have.”

And that’s how you “stick the landing” in the gymnastics business.

RESOURCES: Paul Kemp and Mona Warner, Midwest Gym Supply, at www.midwestgymssupply.com | Joan DeVeau, DeVeau’s School of Gymnastics, at www.deveaus.com