

Modern of Marshfield

137 W. 9th Street

Modern of Marshfield, a manufacturer of upholstered furniture, was founded in 1944 in Chicago as a bedding company, the Banner Mattress Company. During the company's early years, it also operated under the names Allstates Bedding Company and Modern Sleep Products Company. In 1958 the company moved from Chicago to Marshfield, Wisconsin and Stillwell "Jay" Conner acquired full ownership. Mr. Conner served as company president until 1981 when he became Chairman of the Board, a position he held until his death in July 1992.



Jay Conner was an entrepreneur whose personal integrity shaped the company he built and directed. His word was his contract. His strength of character overcame many obstacles. When describing Jay, most friends and business associates way that he was a true gentleman.

In 1977, Modern Sleep Products reincorporated as Modern of Marshfield, Inc., a Wisconsin corporation. However, the changes of 1977 were much more than a name change. Modern of Marshfield took a bold business gamble by deciding to devote 100 percent of its production to upholstery for independent furniture dealers. Previously, only 10 percent of sales were furniture items sold through independent furniture dealers. The remaining 90 percent of the product lines consisted of bedding, jack knife sofa beds, upholstered toy chests, and cat scratching posts.

The gamble worked, but only after Modern of Marshfield defined its market by listening to and learning from existing customers, potential dealers, and company colleagues. A system of recognition awards was established for constructive ideas and the plant's employee's responded with suggestions that steadily built product quality. Gradually sales volume grew to replace the discontinued non-upholstery volume.

Today the firm, housed on three floors in an 80-year-old wooded floored building, has a market spanning the Midwest, serving such customers as Spiegel's, Carson Pirie Scott, Inc. (Boston Store), Younkers, J.C. Penny Company, independent furniture dealers, and several major franchise motels, such as Comfort Suites, Hampton Inns, Budgetel and Residence Inns. A United States Patent # 5,232,266 issued in 1993 for the "First Convertible" has strengthened the firm's market focus.

William Mork, President, is an engineer who developed the above mentioned patent. He has been with Modern of Marshfield since 1969. Before that he was with Texas Instruments.

Claire Mork, daughter of the late Jay Conner, is vice-president of Personnel and Administration. She has established all of Modern's training programs.

In 1972 Modern of Marshfield was named Firm of the Year by the Marshfield Chamber of Commerce. Modern of Marshfield has received numerous commendations in the past few years for its commitment to being a total quality management company. Modern of Marshfield has been recognized as a state leader in the practice of quality management. Wisconsin Governor Tommy Thompson sighted the company for its efforts. The company was also a finalist for Industry Week magazine's "America's Best Pants Search". Modern's most recent honor was be-

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Submitted by Modern of Marshfield for the Marshfield History Project, Volume 1, "*The Marshfield Story: 1872-1997, Piecing Together Our Past*"

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