



Before entering the office of Gosport Manufacturing, your eye catches two framed photos hanging in the vestibule: a memorial to the company’s founders, Victor Goldberg and Mortimer King.

Mortimer’s son, Joe, began working for his father before age 16. Today, at 83, he continues the daily operations. That’s more than 67 years of working at, and now leading, Gosport Manufacturing.

He chuckles about the pressing from his wife and children to start thinking about retiring. But what else would he do at home? Watch reruns of “Gunsmoke” or “Matlock” all day, he supposes.

Hoosier Tarpaulin (founded by Goldberg in Indianapolis and then expanded to Gosport at Mortimer’s urging in 1944) eventually went out of business. In 1981, Joe purchased the Gosport Manufacturing division and moved the operation to its current location overlooking State Road 67. The company produces a variety of canvas, polyethylene and vinyl tarpaulins – or tarps.

Despite having worked for his father part-time for several years, Joe had no tangible plans to stay there after graduating from Indiana University. Instead, he considered becoming a basketball coach or heading into the military.

A medical discharge cut short the potential for a military profession. And Joe recalls his basketball coach advising him to stay in Gosport and help his father run the business.

A short time later, Mortimer suffered a stroke and passed away. Joe was there to keep the business running.

“I think God had a plan for me,” he contends. “My father died in

’57, and somebody had to do this job to keep it going for the small community of Gosport. I decided this is my place and I think God had that plan for me and wanted me in Gosport, Indiana. And I’ve been here ever since.”

Joe points to the employees at the time – and all those who have worked there over the years (thousands, he would guess) – that have been critical to the company’s continued success.

“It was pretty tough, but the people rallied around me. I remember the first day I came in. I got them all together and it was a very emotional time. My dad and I were very close, because I worked for him. And I just asked the people to help support me and do their best and they worked hard,” he recalls.

“They wanted to keep their jobs and we all worked together in unison and made the thing a go. The workers out there are the people that get things done. I can sit here and manage, but they’re the ones that get the product made. And if you’ve got the cooperation of your people and you treat people right, they’ll do a good job for you.”

Joe manages a staff of about 30 today. The greatest number of employees at one time, 220, was during the Vietnam War, when the business was producing tent liners and tent sections for the military effort.

Gosport Manufacturing is as busy as ever, due in part to the internet and the specialty and custom orders that come in. Additionally, the organization itself imports and resells polyethylene tarps.

“We, at the present time, do a big business besides the tarps we make, and we bring in tarps from overseas. There is no way I can even furnish the labor for what (overseas companies) sell them for. A lot of our growth has been in dealing with the imported poly tarps,” he explains.

When asked about the future of the operation, he mentions his nephew, Brad King, is the company’s sales manager (Joe’s children currently have no plans to become involved with the business). But



The employees of Gosport Manufacturing pose in front of the company's original downtown location in the 1950s.

Joe himself is pretty resistant to the idea that he needs to retire any time soon.

"I don't know how many thousands of people maybe have worked here and I would like to ... continue hopefully doing that. I'm 83 years old and I'm not going to live forever. Everybody's been on me about it. Everybody but me," he says with a laugh.

In seeking thoughts from Joe about his community service, he demurs, and mentions his brother, John, who passed away in October and was an insurance agent in town. He insists his brother did more for the community.

"He was always doing something to make life better for people. And the community is really going to miss him. He was a good steward for the community," he comments.

Joe was a torchbearer for Owen County during the recent Bicentennial Torch Relay. He has been involved in the local school board, as well as his church. He also helped launch the Owen County Community Foundation.

"The community has been good to me. I was raised in this community and went to Gosport High School. I've been involved in a lot of community activities, but I don't like to gloat or blow my own whistle," he emphasizes. "I've lived a long time and if you live long enough and you do anything (somebody honors you)."

Others, however, would disagree with Joe about downplaying his impact. The mere mention of his name elicits this response from several in the community: Joe King is a pillar for Owen County and Gosport is lucky to have him.



A tribute to the company founders, Victor Goldberg and Mortimer King, sits in the entryway of Gosport Manufacturing.

RESOURCE: Joe King, Gosport Manufacturing, at www.gosportmanufacturing.com