



Roger Weitalla worked at the Virnig Manufacturing Minnesota location for 24 years and now serves as plant manager at Pikeville.

SMOOTH OPERATIONS

Virnig Manufacturing's two locations work together

Story by LISA SAVAGE

It's about 1,000 miles from the Virnig Manufacturing facility in Rice, Minnesota, to the company's second location in Pikeville, Tennessee. As teams from both locations work together, though, it's like they're in the same room thanks to state-of-the-art fiber internet technology.

In business in Minnesota since 1989, Virnig Manufacturing produces skid steer attachments for tractors and other heavy machinery. Equipment manufacturing takes place at both locations, and a fiber optic internet network helps keep the process flowing smoothly. "We stream training sessions and meetings, and we're able to essentially be in the same room," says Alyssa Monson, Virnig's company relations manager.

Much of the programming and design is web-based, and both facilities have access to high-speed fiber. In Pikeville, BTC Fiber's network provides the bandwidth necessary to collaborate easily. "We're

able to communicate and share files seamlessly," says Robert Goldade, Virnig's vice president of operations. "We run the two facilities as one. Distance isn't an issue."

Virnig purchased the 62,000-square-foot facility in Pikeville in 2021, investing \$11.6 million to expand operations and help meet growing product demands in the Southeast.

THE EARLY YEARS

Dean and Lois Virnig both grew up in rural Pierz, Minnesota, and knew the importance of reliable repair work for local farms and construction companies. They established the business in 1989 in a garage on their property just outside Pierz and focused on repairs and custom orders.

Word traveled fast in the small town and across central Minnesota. Within five years of opening the doors, Dean and Lois moved from their makeshift shop into a larger building and expanded into manufacturing

skid steer attachments and dump trailers. They subsequently changed their company's name to Virnig Manufacturing Inc.

By the mid-1990s, the company was focusing more on attachments like skid loaders. A high demand for their products, along with limited space, led the Virnigs to build a state-of-the-art facility in 2001, about 30 miles away in Rice, Minnesota. Continued growth led to an additional facility in 2010, and they added another 28,000-square-foot building in 2014 that includes an automated wash bay and powder-coat paint system.

The company added a 24,000-square-foot welding addition and office space for engineering in 2021. Today, Virnig Manufacturing has almost 200 employees. All the growth at the Minnesota location didn't address the transportation issues with one of their main distributors about an hour north of Atlanta, however, Dean says.

In late 2021, the company started



Photos by Mark Gilliland



Josh Weitalla, of Virnig Manufacturing, uses a laser cutting machine at the facility in Pikeville.



Jesse Blankenship works in the final assembly and inspection department at Virnig Manufacturing.



Bobby Shepherd attaches side edges to a piece of equipment at Virnig Manufacturing.

looking for a location within two or three hours of Atlanta. The Chattanooga area was considered first, and company officials connected with the Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development, and Sam Wills, the agency's southeast regional director. "He took us around and showed us some great locations," Dean says. "Then Sam asked us if we'd consider being farther out, in a more rural area, and he told us about Pikeville."

Some of the Virnig family went on a few trips across the Southeast to scout other possible locations. "We saw a lot of nice places, but it just felt right every time we came back to Pikeville," Dean says.

When the Virnig team met with Pikeville city and Bledsoe County officials, they felt welcome. "It felt similar to the area we've always been used to," Dean says.

With the help of city and state officials, Virnig searched for a new facility and ultimately found the Pikeville property that suited the company's needs perfectly. Virnig bought the 62,000-square-foot building in November 2021 and started renovations. In early 2022, production started, and the company hosted an open house last May which was attended by the governor and other state and local officials. "They really made us feel welcome throughout the entire process, and that cemented the decision that we made to locate in Pikeville," Dean says.

THE MANUFACTURING PROCESS

Virnig's facilities in Minnesota and Pikeville encompass all aspects of the manufacturing process, from engineering and cutting raw materials to machining, welding and painting all of its skid steer attachments in-house. The company

is already seeing the savings in transportation costs. Equipment made in Pikeville travels more quickly, and less expensively, to the Georgia distributor and to the East Coast for easier access to shipping along the Eastern Seaboard.

Although the company has grown substantially over the past 30 years, the mission of providing a high-quality, durable product has been — and will continue to be — the same in Pikeville. Plant Manager Roger Weitalla, who worked at the Rice facility for 24 years, leads that effort. He and his family relocated to Pikeville a year ago. "My family loves it here," Roger says.

The expansion in Pikeville will eventually create 74 new jobs in Bledsoe County. About 20 people are currently on the payroll. "We've hired some really good people, and that has allowed us to get everything going and up to speed," Roger says. 🗨️