Welcome to our first edition of Threads 'N Stitches. My goal is to make a connection with all our friends and customers by sharing news, helpful tips and creating a unique way to listen. Hopefully, this newsletter will help you make your business more fulfilling, fun and profitable, while allowing us to get input from all of you.

When I sent out the card questionnaire, I was surprised at the great response we received and your very helpful suggestions and comments concerning the contents of this newsletter.

Here is what you can expect in the newsletter:

1. **Perspective:** My perspective on current market events and business tips that I have learned over the past thirty years

2. **Leadership Notes:** How to grow your business and lead your employees well

3. **Marketing and Sales Tips:** How to name brand your products no matter how small or large your business

4. **Questions and Answers:** Ask us your questions and if we don’t know the answer, we usually know someone who does

5. **Machinery Tips:** Maintenance and troubleshooting on sewing machines and other leather working machinery

6. **Business Articles:** Relating to harness, saddlery and other relevant business topics

I thought it would be appropriate to start this newsletter with a brief history of where Weaver Leather began and where we are headed.

Weaver Leather was started in 1973 by my father, Harry A. Weaver. My father was literally involved in leather all of his adult life. At age fourteen, his experience and knowledge began as he worked with shoe repair to harness making and repair and eventually worked at a leather production facility called Orrville Leather. From there he started Weaver Leather Goods at home in our truck garage where he repaired shoes, made leather horse halters, leather pet products, and provided products and services for the harness industry. What made Dad’s experience so unique is that he not only made and repaired just about everything imaginable, but he also was introduced into big quantity production and was in charge of all the steps from cutting to finishing. If I had to name one thing that was a breakthrough for us and who we are today it was his ability to cut products from leather sides that had brands, holes, insect damage and deep neck wrinkles. In other words, he knew what to use for what parts, and he did so and used up most of the sides.

If all of you think that the leather back then was better than today, you are sadly mistaken. New machinery, better hides and much better technology allow our tanners today to produce much better leather than they did twenty to thirty years ago. Dad also knew how to keep his labor costs low by streamlining production and forming an assembly line type of operation. Sadly, I never learned all of his techniques because of his sudden and unexpected death only three years after my brother, Vernon, and I became a part of the business. However, he was a natural born teacher and loved to teach us anything that he thought would be of value.

“...Weaver’s 38 years of success is the direct result of everyone giving 100% of their abilities and talents every day along with the blessing of a God-honoring life.”

Diplomatic, he was not. He didn’t mince words and would often make a point that people never forgot. We went from basically being a contract manufacturer to having our own line of products. Dad and I started the supply side of our business in our chicken house where we stored and shipped leather and hardware. His expertise was what drew customers to us because he could help with almost any questions the customer had. It is my desire to honor him and his memory by doing this newsletter and giving back to all of our wonderful customers with what we have learned over the years.

We grew at a pace that was hard to sustain for many years. The philosophy is simple: give people a quality product every time and ship it quickly and accurately. The prices all of us charge must be a reflection of the quality, availability and the value we add to our customers in advertising, merchandising and knowing what to sell.
I think it would be appropriate to begin our leather corner section with some basics and the history of leather. Tanned skins have been around almost as long as mankind itself has. As a matter of fact, I ran across an article on the internet that you can also look up for more information. The information is listed under “World’s Oldest Shoe”. This shoe was found recently by archeologists in an Armenian cave. The shoe was estimated to be 5,500 years old. The shoe was stuffed with grass and lined with yellow clay and covered in sheep dung. There was little or no light in the cave; hence, the reason for the preservation of this artifact. The shoe was made out of cowhide and had laces going up the middle. The shoe was of high quality and was tanned from the oil of plants or vegetables. If my calculations are right, this would have been soon after the Creation. The Creation took place 6,011 years ago and Adam, the first created human being, lived over 900 years. So it was in that era that tanning cowhide was already in existence.

Leather is a product that is always in style, lasts a long time and is comfortable for both man and beast to wear. There are two basic tannages today. One is vegetable tanning which is what we use mainly in the making of harness and saddlery items. The other is chrome tanning which is used in shoe uppers, furniture, upholstery, garments or anywhere soft pliable and lighter weight leather is needed. Vegetable tanning is done in pits using natural ingredients like extracts from trees or tree bark. The hides are hung in this tannic acid solution for a month or more, whereas chrome tanned leather is done in drums and only takes a few days to tan. Both the time it takes to tan and the cost of chemicals and labor reduce the cost of chrome tanned leather. You can usually tell the difference by looking at the edge/center of your leather. Brown/tan edge equals veg tan; gray center equals chrome tan.

There are qualities in vegetable tanned leather that are not found in chrome, such as moldability (where you can wet and form then dry and it will retain its shape); carving, stamping, tooling or embossing are other qualities not suitable with chrome tanning. Strength and thickness are also a plus on vegetable leather where full thickness and optimal strength are required. The other benefit is that when finishing edges, the veg tanned leather can be burnished and made very smooth with our Gum Tragacanth compound. This makes for a beautiful feeling and looking edge, and the use of hand or powered slickers is a great help to speed up the process. All of these products are found in our 2011 Supply Catalog.

When working with leather, it is important to note several things:

Leather is an expensive product compared to nylon webbing or other manmade products, so it is important to understand that all things made of leather in our society are usually sold at a premium. Car interiors, upholstered furniture, shoes, purses, saddles and harnesses will almost always cost more than fabrics or leather look-alikes. Hence the reason that we should keep that in mind when making products to re-sell. We should always have a product that looks,
The Leather Corner Cont.

feels and outperforms all others, and we should price these products as premium products.

The ingredient that increases or decreases the value of a leather product is the workmanship and design of that item. We can use the best and cleanest leather and if the workmanship looks crude or sloppy, the value is diminished. The other reason to price your leather items correctly is the fact that it is a natural product with irregular shapes and blemishes found on almost all hides. To compensate for that, we must build in a realistic waste factor. The more items you make with one type of leather, the less waste you should have. A normal waste factor could be anywhere from 20% to 35%, again, depending on size, shape and quality standard. The most common cuts of vegetable leather are sides, backs, shoulders or bends. Sides are usually the most economical and have the firm butt leather with the shoulders and bellies attached.

In future articles, we will have specific tips on how to cut for more yield and how to arrive at an accurate cost for the leather you are using. We will also offer tips on tools, machinery and sewing machines in order to help you be profitable and to make your products look professionally made. We will try to keep a fairly broad spectrum of products in mind as we write articles but will focus the core of our information on the harness and saddlery trade, as this encompasses most of our customer base.

If you have a specific need for information that we do not include, don’t hesitate to ask us for more information either by email, telephone or mail. Our goal is to educate you, the customer, to make smart buying choices for leather, hardware, tools and machinery. We will always offer specials and items on sale with this newsletter, along with any new products we are coming out with.

The new product that is directly connected to molding leather or crafting leather for this article is our liquid Leather Firmer that allows you to make your leather extra firm to keep its shape. You can do this by simply dipping your finished product in this solution and letting it dry. The results are amazing.

Did You Know...

...that the history of Braille originated from a small harness shop in France by a person named Louis Braille?

Louis was from a small town called Coupvray, near Paris. He was born on January 4, 1809. Louis became blind at the age of three due to an accident in his dad’s harness workshop. Louis tried to be like his dad, but it went very wrong; he grabbed an awl, a sharp tool for making holes, and the tool slid and hurt his eye. The wound became infected, and the infection spread, and soon, Louis was blind in both eyes.

The story reminds us of two things:
1) A leather working shop has a lot of sharp tools and is really no place for children to play.
2) In every tragedy and hardship there is an opportunity to make life better for others.

Because of Louis’ adversity, today millions of people with visual impairments can enjoy reading books, street signs and reap countless other benefits — all because he did not revel in his misery, but became known all over the world for his innovation. And, it all started in a harness shop!

Leather Tips from Harry Weaver

By Paul Weaver

Dad taught us the importance of wetting leather before bending or folding it in order to apply hardware and to sew the lap. In almost every application, Dad would grab a bunch of straps and place the ends (3 – 4 inches) into a bucket of warm water for 5 seconds and then fold the straps where the leather would be folded over the hardware. Before the leather completely dried, he would sew the laps; I watched him do this many times. His reasoning behind this procedure was that veg tanned leather is usually firm and its full thickness could be between 12 – 15 ounces and to bend or fold the leather too many times would cause the top grain to separate. The top grain on leather is very thin (usually only 1 ounce of the top is considered top grain) and is not the strongest part of the hide even though it tools, carves and embosses well.

When folding veg leather, all those intertwined fibers must bend in an unnatural way which puts

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tremendous pressure on the very top to crack or separate. The worst area is where the tightest grain is and that is in the butt of the side. Wetting relaxes the fibers and allows for a nice clean bend and will also allow you to sew up closer to the hardware because it will lay down flatter. If you don’t believe this theory, take some straps off the belly where the fibers are looser and bend them; they will rarely crack.

Dad did this with all kinds of leather from strap, skirting, bridle, latigo or harness. He rarely had a cracking problem and his laps were always tighter and stitched up farther than most. Try it; you will be surprised at the outcome.

Many people have asked me the question, “How do you market products and services effectively?” There are three key components I have identified through my years of experience in the industry, the most important being to name brand your company and your products. Marketing and name branding are not a throw-the-switch answer or solution. I like to call it a crock pot method, not a microwave; meaning, there is no simple answer that works for everyone and it takes time (and many ingredients) to indelibly mark your name into the minds of your customers.

Some of you simply need to identify all of the products you sell by affixing your name to each and every product you make! Whether you stamp it in leather, put an engraved plate on a saddle or use an adhesive tag somewhere on your products, it all starts there. You have no idea how many people will see this product and how many opportunities your customer will have to tell people where it came from. The best advertising in the world is still a satisfied customer telling another about how well they like the product or services. However, word of mouth can cut both ways. A dissatisfied customer will tell at least seven people of their bad experience in dealing with your company. There is no substitute for good friendly customer relations and developing little ways that show the customer that you appreciate their business.

Check out the next issue of Threads ‘N Stitches for the second key component of the Marketing Crock Pot: friendly customer service.

We have found out that it works better with a bigger needle, for example, the 794S-230 size 26 or 794S-250 size 27. These needles work well with 207 Bobbin Thread and 277 Top Thread. Thread is found on page 320 in our 2011 Supply Catalog and needles are found on page 318. Be sure to check out our needle and thread chart on page 319.