



CEI's renovated facility space at 1220 W. Fulton St. Photo Courtesy CEI

Cupertino Electric expands in Edgerton

By *Tristan McGough*
Special to the Reporter

“We have four facilities throughout the Madison area,” states Nathan Larson, Director of Operations for Cupertino Electric, Inc. (CEI) in Wisconsin,” but the Edgerton facility is the largest of our assembly facilities, and about four times the size of our next, smaller but similar facility in Madison.”

Larson explained that CEI is an electrical engineering and construction company that meets the special requirements of commercial, renewable, utility, modular, and data center clients. The firm provides customers with design-build options for creating proprietary infrastructures that optimize electrical distribution from the grid to their facility with its multivariate requirements.

Though its corporate offices are in San Jose, Calif., CEI also has offices in Silicon Valley, San Francisco and the Los Angeles area where many large-scale, commercial electrical projects are built. Additionally, CEI also regularly undertakes projects throughout the U.S., focusing on large renewable, utility and data center projects.

And that is why CEI is in Wisconsin: to answer the call for advanced electrical solutions in expanding markets, like the Fox-Conn Technology Group, which says it will create 13,000 jobs in Wisconsin while investing \$10 billion in its planned manufacturing campus.

Now occupying over 40 percent of the old roughly 850,000 sq. ft. Dana/Caterpillar building at 1220 W. Fulton St. in Edgerton, Larson says CEI has only been operating its Edgerton facility since early 2018, leasing the space from Phoenix Investors, LLC, which is headquartered in Milwaukee.

Phoenix was created in 1994 to manage its two trusts, which are private investment companies. Kurt Jensen, VP of Acquisitions & Leasing, asserts, “We’re a buy and hold firm, so we’re looking at

the future.”

With properties across the U.S., Jensen said, “We are proud to be in Edgerton and love the people there,” and indicated further that the investors have made “substantial construction” in the old assembly plant and are seeking patrons to occupy its remaining space, though, presently, two clients other than Cupertino are taking-up minor parts of the 848,530 sq. ft. facility which sits on 123 acres.

Jensen disclosed, “We have renovated the entire space, including upgraded T-8 lighting.” He also pointed-out that the massive facility features a rail service with spur, a five-ton crane, and 14 acres of parking.

The extensive renovations made the building attractive to CEI.

Cupertino’s Gaylon Morris, Sr. VP of Strategic Growth, stated, “There are a lot of reasons why we’re in the Madison and Edgerton area, besides the upgraded facility. Some are historical,” he vouchsafed, “starting about eight years ago with a critical vendor in the area that gave us a footing.”

“Though they left, we stayed,” Morris said.

The senior VP went on to describe how CEI operates its four divisions: Commercial, Renewable, Utility, and Data Center, designing and building special electrical distribution systems for each client, all which insist on non-disclosure agreements (NDAs).

For that reason, the proprietary electrical platforms and panels, gear-boxes and switches that occupy the nearly 300,000 feet of space now being utilized by CEI in the mammoth facility cannot be photographed. Client NDS forbid it.

“We have customers of all shapes and sizes from a wide variety of industries,” Morris declares, “and they come to us for a variety of reasons, but they all share a concern for protecting their assets, including intellectual assets.”



Cupertino's Senior VP says there are historical reasons why his electrical engineering firm is in Edgerton.

Courtesy CEI

Morris detailed the services menu of CEI, which includes in-house engineering, procurement and best pricing, pre-fabrication to speed-up project delivery, construction that utilizes skilled union electricians, commissioning that provides a turn-key project, as well as OM (maintenance and operations), which offers full-service maintenance support and emergency support through a skilled 24/7 Service Department.

Such a full-service electrical design and build array has made CEI an attractive company to do business with, especially if a large-scale commercial, renewable energy (including solar), data, modular or utility project is being considered. And with NDAs in force, each client feels their intellectual capital is protected.

Larson said that a couple of the projects CEI is doing as cloistered work at the Fulton Street facility are substantial ones, two of them commanding assembly space of over 100,000 sq. ft. apiece.

“Business is favorable,” Director of Ops Larson admits, “but future expansion is limited by the available electricians.”

Since electrical unions provide the manpower and boots-on-the-



With proprietary information at stake, interior photography that might reveal client assets is prohibited.

Photo by Tristan McGough



Cupertino Electric occupies about 40 percent of the 850,000 sq ft Edgerton facility, once the Caterpillar factory and now owned by Phoenix Investors.

Photo by Tristan McGough

ground skills to turn CEI’s designs into built-reality, union electricians are in high demand but short supply.

“We pull from a wide area,” Larson says, “Madison, Janesville, Edgerton, and in between.”

“At any one time we may have as many as 200 people working for us in Wisconsin, though many of them are professionals under subcontract to provide a specialized service. In that way, we act like a general contractor, having subcontractors get the talent we need.”

Larson indicated that, currently, about 30 people are full-time CEI employees in Wisconsin. However, the company is actively seeking to expand

its ranks to fill positions—mainly administrative and support for the moment—at one of their four facilities. CEI has a downtown Madison office and two small pre-fab plants on the outskirts of the city.

The Edgerton plant dwarfs the others and is probably the best facility to accommodate future growth; however, nothing is set in stone, even though prospects for future electrical expansion needs—like the new Albion substation—are on CEI’s radar.

“Our business model,” Larsen declares, “provides the design-build framework where we can use local professionals, electrical contractors, and businesses, thereby stimulating the local economy.”

“Right now, many of our em-

ployees and workers come from Janesville. But all the people we’ve been working with are top-notch folks. I can say we are happy in Edgerton, and with a three-year lease, we’re not going anywhere else.”

Further discussion revealed the possibility of future CEI expansion taking place in Waunakee or Waukesha, where strategic business relationships may favor these sites.

Nonetheless, the old Caterpillar behemoth of a building on Fulton Street in Edgerton—fully refurbished and newly upgraded—may still offer the best cocoon in which the largely secret operations of CEI can be conducted without short-circuiting their non-disclosure contracts.

Canning and preserving in Wisconsin

By *Kristin Finstad*

It’s harvest season, which means the bounty of Wisconsin’s homegrown goodies is coming in! With the help of Something Special from Wisconsin™, we’ve compiled a list of a few locally-made jams, jellies, preserves, salsas, and pickled vegetables to stock up on and enjoy all winter long.

1. Chip Magnet Salsa

(<http://somethingspecialwi.com/list/member/chip-magnet-salsa-eau-claire-5108>)

Chip Magnet is based in Eau Claire and provides its customers with delicious and high-quality products. Choose from a variety of salsas, including Black Bean, Mango, Garlicious and Cilantro Lime. In the relish category, there’s Top Dog, which is a combination of pickle relish and hot peppers, Corn Star, which features sweet corn, red bell peppers, onion and Serrano pepper, or Hell’s Bells, which is perfect for sub sandwiches, pizza, dips, and so much more!

2. Always & Forever Designz

(<http://something-specialwi.com/list/member/always-forever-designz-llc-fond-du-lac-5142>)

For delicious, old-fashioned products that taste like they came straight from your grandma’s pantry, check out Always & Forever Designz, based out of Fond du Lac. You’ll find preserves, relishes, jams and but-



An example of the offerings at Kenosha’s Elsa Mae’s shop. Photo courtesy Elsie Mae’s Cannery and Pies

ters both classic and unique, such as Blackberry Jalapeno Jam, Peach Rhubarb Bourbon Jam, Corn Relish, Cherry Butter, Bread & Butter Pickles, Apple Butter, Cranberry Salsa, and so much more!

3. Polzin Farms

(<http://somethingspecialwi.com/list/member/polzin-farms-grafton-4747>)

While Polzin Farms is well-versed in all things homemade (i.e. popcorn, caramel corn and cheese corn), their bread and butter (pun intended) is jams and preserves. With everything from strawberry, strawberry-rhubarb and strawberry-jalapeno preserves, to raspberry, raspberry-jalapeno pepper and hot jalapeno jam, Polzin Farms has you covered whether you’re more sweet or more savory.

4. Storandt Farms

(<http://somethingspecialwi.com/list/member/storandt-farms-5883>)

This third-generation family farm specializes in making salsa, jams and jellies inspired by local and sustainable ingredients found on the farm. Choose from Peachberry, Apple Raspberry, Plum, Raspberry Jalapeno, and Spicy Pear Jam, or go for a salsa in the “Just A Whisper”, “Bite Your Tongue”, “One Hot Secret”, or “Pants on Fire” varieties.

5. Flyte Family Farms LLC

(<http://something-specialwi.com/list/member/flyte-family-farms-llc-coloma-5260>)

The Flyte Family Farm grows organic and conventional crops to create delicious salsas,



Eau Claire’s Chip Magnet offers a variety of salsas, relish, dips and more. Photo courtesy Chip Magnet

salsas and jellies. Visit the farm and pick your own strawberries and blueberries for freezing, baking, or making jam, or purchase their Farmers Salsa, Mildly Hot Salsa, or Corn & Black Bean Salsa.

6. Elsie Mae’s Cannery & Pies

(<http://something-specialwi.com/list/member/elsie-mae-s-cannery-pies-5795>)

This Kenosha shop uses local produce and family recipes to preserve traditional and old-fashioned canning. Aside from its delicious pies (seriously, go get yourself one), you’ll find more than 120 different flavors of jams throughout the year, varying by season. Flavors include strawberry rhubarb, carrot cake, chocolate cranberry peppermint, dandelion, peach cobbler, gingered Asian pear and

7. Door County Wildwood Market

(<http://somethingspecialwi.com/list/member/door-county-wildwood-market-sister-bay-3001>)

Door County Wildwood Market lives on the Carlson farm just north of Sister Bay. The small operation grows a variety of local fruits and produce, including Pick-Your-Own cherries, strawberries, pumpkins, and tomatoes, if you’re interested in making your own preserves! The market also offers pickled vegetables, fresh jams, salsas, marinara sauces and more!

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Fiscal Facts

Declining births may worsen Wisconsin’s worker shortage

Declining birth and fertility rates are especially important in Wisconsin given the state’s recent history of net out-migration. Since the mid-2000s, Wisconsin has lost more residents to migration than it has gained.

Together, these trends could add to the state’s future labor challenges. The most recent state projections suggest Wisconsin’s working-age population (20-64) will decline by 0.2 percent between 2010 and 2040, while the retirement-age population will nearly double. But these estimates may be too optimistic, since they assume the state will net nearly 300,000 residents through migration and that annual births will rise.

This information is a service of the Wisconsin Policy Forum, the state’s leading resource for nonpartisan state and local government research and civic education.

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