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Fits like a glove

Idaho-made gloves are pride of business

By CLARK CORBIN

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Although he turned overseas to compete with less expensive products, Boyd Zollinger is still most proud of the deer, elk and goat skin gloves his company makes in Idaho Falls.

Zollinger is president of Yellowstone Leather Products Inc., a wholesale manufacturer and supplier that has made Yellowstone Gloves on South Colorado Avenue for 50 years.

"We still have a really strong niche," said Zollinger, an eastern Idaho native. "Certain people are more comfortable with an American-made glove, so we have a strong niche to cater to."

Production of the gloves made in Idaho Falls peaked 10 years ago at about 50 dozen pairs per day, but it is now roughly 24 dozen pairs.

Zollinger has made up the difference by buying and marketing another line of gloves made overseas. His high-end homemade Yellowstone Gloves and the imported Rocky Mountain Gloves have enabled his company to compete at multiple price points, allowing the company to battle it out with less expensive foreign products.

Yellowstone Gloves made in Idaho now account for 40 percent of the company's business.

"It's like Ford or any other car dealership that offers a number of different automobiles at a lot of different prices," Zollinger said. "If you only make one style, you really limit the range of customers you can satisfy."

During the past decade, Yellowstone Leather Products' business grew by 10 percent to 12 percent a year, Zollinger said. In 2009, growth flattened out with the downturn in the economy and the slump in the construction industry.



Monte LaOrange / mlaorange@postregister.com - Jose Chavez, an employee at Yellowstone Leather Products Inc., places finished gloves on a heated iron that shapes and forms the gloves. The business was purchased by Boyd Zollinger in 1969 and has been producing gloves locally for 41 years. The gloves are made from deer, elk and goat skin.



Monte LaOrange / mlaorange@postregister.com - Boyd Zollinger, left, is the owner of Yellowstone Leather Products Inc., which has made Yellowstone Gloves on South Colorado Avenue for 50 years.

Zollinger anticipates a return to growth, hoping an economic rebound and an increased focus on marketing will help his company start growing again.

Each pair of Yellowstone Gloves' journey to retail shelves starts when employees purchase hides from hunters and game processors.

Workers then cut, dry, sew, turn and press the leather assembly-line style, producing a high-end work glove designed for linemen, construction crews and ranchers.

One factor that makes Yellowstone Gloves unique is the company's patented design, which features a seamless palm that is more likely to stand up to wear.

"We found their quality is far superior to any other glove we carry," said Jim Smith, president of Smith & Edwards, an Ogden, Utah, retailer that has stocked Yellowstone Gloves for more than 35 years. "Most people who buy Yellowstone know they are quality gloves that will last longer than two or three other pairs they could buy cheaper."

Although Yellowstone Leather Products does not sell gloves out of its Idaho Falls office, its products are available at BMC West, Workman's Warehouse and many Idaho Falls convenience stores.

A pair of Yellowstone Gloves runs between \$20 and \$24. The Rocky Mountain gloves start at \$4.

Although Yellowstone Gloves remains the company's signature line, imported Rocky Mountain Gloves are an important tool in keeping customers such as Smith & Edwards happy, Zollinger said.

"If you look at the glove racks (at a retail shop), they offer a lot of different varieties," Zollinger said. "We want to be able to fill that rack and let our customers offer their customers the best selection."

On the internet

Yellowstone Leather Products Inc.: www.yellowstonegloves.com

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