

RON WENZEL - 2005 AWARD WINNER – WINONA CAMPUS

At graduation ceremonies held May 2005, Minnesota State College - Southeast Technical paid tribute to Ron Wenzel, Southeast Technical College class of 1967. Ron is an alumnus, foundation board member and friend of the college. He received the college's first Outstanding Alumni award--Winona campus. The college could not have honored a more deserving graduate. Leaving his mark for years to come, Ron has never sought credit for his contributions to Southeast Technical, Winona, and the surrounding community.

Ron graduated from the electronics program in 1967 and began putting his skills to work at Peerless Chain where he worked on inventory control systems with the Winona company. It was here that Ron gained experience in working with a new plant layout, production flow and computerized inventory that fueled his need to learn more about manufacturing. After Peerless Chain, Ron went to work in the field he sought his education--electronics--with Lake Center Industries of Winona. Nearly a decade spent with the firm as a production manager, plant manager and sales engineer led him to grow and develop business relationships with nationally known companies, such as IBM, Whirlpool, 3-M, Amana and Norelco, to name a few.

His creativity and entrepreneurial spirit continued to pick up speed and it was just a matter of time before Ron expanded his horizons. It was his next opportunity that placed him in the booming world of contract manufacturing. He decided to get in on a ground floor opportunity and joined the founders of yet another Winona original -- EMD Associates (now Benchmark Electronics) as director of sales and marketing.

Ron's interest in electronics, his personality, and his genuine love for people made him a natural salesman. His interests continued in manufacturing and the marketing of proprietary products. After a few years and his expanded knowledge of the electronics manufacturing industry, Ron took up a new challenge. In 1984, he and two others formed their own electronics company: Riverside Electronics. Once again, his strengths and instincts in sales were used to build the framework of the company that quickly grew and now employs over 340 people.

Ron has been known for his many business ventures, too many to list. He has successfully created co-owned, bought and sold a number of businesses. But if you ask Ron, he believes success comes in many packages -- all evident in Ron's commitment as a community leader and active volunteer. He continually inspires others with his enthusiasm and his example. Since he graduated in 1967, he has been a constant supporter of the college and its programs. Among his many honors, Ron has served as a Southeast Technical employee. He was a founding member of the Foundation Board and an advisory committee member. In the community, he has volunteered his time, money, and service to numerous community clubs and other organizations.

When asked to comment on his being named an outstanding alumnus, Ron humbly replied, "I feel so honored -- I don't think that I'm special. I like to think everyone can do what I do."

Ron and his wife Karroll have two sons, Jason and Chad, and five grandchildren. Between life's adventures, Ron relaxes by spending his time traveling with family and friends.