

BREAKING NEWS

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FEATURED

## BUSINESS OF THE WEEK: Waterloo Container

By DAVID L. SHAW [dshaw@fltimes.com](mailto:dshaw@fltimes.com) Feb 28, 2019



photo submitted

SENECA FALLS — First, the grape vines are planted. Then, the fruit is nurtured and harvested at the right time. Finally, the wine is made.

However, before anyone can buy and drink a fine Finger Lakes wine, vintners must put their product in bottles. The same goes for craft beer creators and distilleries — minus the grapes, of course.

Enter Waterloo Container.

Owner Bill Lutz said the company gets all sizes and colors of wine bottles from glassmakers all over the state, although their primary supplier is from Ardagh Group in Port Allegany, Pa. Waterloo Container either sends its fleet of trucks to get the bottles, or the bottle manufacturer will bring them to Waterloo Container's Route 414 facility.

Lutz said the staff works with the beverage makers on what they want the labels to look like. The company has a machine that will install a shrink sleeve label on the bottle. The company decorates the bottles with colorful and informative labels, boxes them, and ships them to winemakers. Their trucks also bring along natural and synthetic corks, glass stoppers, screw caps, seals, foil bands, and wire hoods to seal the bottles after the wine has been poured into the containers.

Waterloo Container is a nearly 40-year-old, family-owned business that was founded to support the rapidly growing Finger Lakes and East Coast wine industry. It was established by the late Norman Lutz and his son, Bill, as an offshoot of Waterloo Contractors, Norm Lutz's business. After Norm died, Bill carried on, along with his wife, Annette, and CEO Rich Swinehart.

"We have contracts with wineries, breweries and distillers based on forecasts on how many bottled they will need," Bill said. "We box up the bottles and deliver them on demand, along with any closures they might need.

"We have more than 500 different bottles in stock. We had four when we started."

He said the bottles range from 50-milliliter bottles to 9-liter ones. The majority, though, are 750-milliliter bottles.

"As the wine industry has grown since the '90s, so have we to meet that demand," Swinehart noted. "Now, we're adding craft beer and spirits to our list of customers, and those two industries are growing fast."

Lutz said the company has a glass-printing specialist on the payroll to work with companies to design their shrink sleeves and labels, as well as designs on the boxes of bottles.

The business started out in the Waterloo Contractors building on Kendig Street in Waterloo before the current structure was erected. The building is completing its fifth addition, a 37,000-square-foot warehouse and packaging facility.

“We have about 5,000 customers, so it takes a lot of planning to meet their needs,” Lutz said. “We have a warehouse in Florida to serve a major winemaker down there. We have 12 warehouses, including in part of the old Borden’s ReaLemon plant in Waterloo, H.P. Neun in Geneva, and sites in Marion and Sodus. While most of our business is in the Northeast, we will ship all over the country.

“In 1980, when we started, there were only a few wineries. Then the Farm Winery Act passed and it just took off. Now, the state has more than 400 wineries, many of them right in this area, of course.”

Swinehart and Lutz said they try to buy as much from local vendors as possible, touting the company as a major supporter of community programs and services. They say they offer good-paying jobs with benefits, and work hard to create a family atmosphere. Frequent parties and outings for employees and their families has resulted in low turnover, they agreed.

As to the future, even more warehouse and office space will be required. Lutz hopes that will happen in Seneca County, but notes other states have made overtures.

“It would be good if we could stay right here,” he said.

**Waterloo Container**

**Location:** 2311 Route 414, Seneca Falls

**Founded:** 1980

**Employees:** 53

**Hours:** 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. weekdays

**Phone:** (315) 539-3922

**Website:** [www.waterloocontainer.com](http://www.waterloocontainer.com)

**Facebook:** Yes

