

# INSIGHT

## SPECIAL SECTION

**THINC! Awards**  
honor innovators



**SHAWANO**  
**WAUPACA**  
**CONSTRUCTION**

Surrounded by abundant natural beauty outside, CEO John Ogorek and the team at Nicolet Plastics have built a global business by leveraging the Northwoods lifestyle and creating unique tools to attract both talent and new customers to its flexible business model.

## SIDE HUSTLE

Manitowoc teacher  
branches out with  
craft brewery

## INSIDER

Workplaces look to  
attract millennials

## PERSONALITIES

Thornberry Creek's  
Josh Doxtator preps  
for LPGA spotlight

## NEW NORTH

Videos play vital role  
in recruiting workers

# PLASTIC PASSIONS

Nicolet Plastics embraces its rustic setting while growing  
into a global supplier of injection-molded plastic components





**Margaret LeBrun**

Executive Editor

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## NOMINATED:

Catalpa Health Inc.  
 Crane Engineering  
 Dodles Inc.  
 EDCi  
 Endries International Inc.  
 energybank, Inc.  
 Evergreen  
 Faith Technologies Inc.  
 Fork Farms  
 Illumyx  
 J. J. Keller & Associates Inc.  
 Lanehub  
 Miravida Living  
 Miron Construction Co. Inc.  
 PAi  
 R2H Flavor Technology, LLC  
 TecDriven, LLC  
 TEDxOshkosh  
 Tweet Garot Mechanical Inc.  
 Verity Financial Fraud Examiners  
 VHornet  
 VibeTech Inc.  
 Visionary Business Solutions Inc.  
 Wooda  
 Xensr

# CELEBRATING 5 YEARS OF INSIGHT INNOVATION AWARDS

It's always interesting to see how different companies approach innovation.

In this, our fifth year of coordinating the Insight Innovation Awards and announcing the winners at our THINC! conference, we see everything from mature companies, turning things upside down with technology, to startups taking a risk on a great idea.

In total, we had 25 entries. Reading through them — and learning about all the clever and innovative ways to make things, to get things done and to motivate people — was a humbling experience. Although Insight staff members were impartial in the selection process, our independent panel of judges spent a good amount of time reviewing every application and debating those that rose to the top.

The judges chose five winners, in the categories: People, Product, Process and Planet — plus a special award that only one name fit: "Entrepreneurial Grit."

And isn't that what it's all about?

Our 2018 winners were announced at our annual THINC! event in May. Recaps of their innovation stories appear in this special section. A list of our all nominees appears at the left.

In the category "Process," the award went to J. J. Keller & Associates, the Neenah-based company that built its business back in 1953 advising trucking companies about federal regulations, and over decades, expanding its offerings to many other industries. But in recent years, J. J. Keller took the plunge to completely transform its business by embracing technology and taking its products digital.

Faith Technologies, based in Menasha, is our winner in the "People" category. Most

companies offer employee training, but Faith went innovative with its commitment to employee learning. It developed its own nationally accredited apprenticeship programs, converted a former office into a training center and as a result, has positioned itself to add up to 350 skilled workers annually.

By now you've probably heard of the indoor gardening trend. But you may not know that right here in our own backyard, a startup company in Menasha called Fork Farms has developed a truly innovative, portable system for growing greens with lights, indoors, year-round. Our judges called it "transformational, not just locally, but globally." Fork Farms is our winner in the category "Planet."

Wisconsin has a long history of pride in craftsmanship. Wooda, a company based in Omro, takes in exceptional furniture designs from companies nationwide and then produces them at no cost to the designers. Designers receive royalties on sales. Brilliant, huh? Wooda is our winner in the "Product" category.

This year, our judges granted a special award, for "Entrepreneurial Grit", to R2H Flavor Technology of Manitowoc. The company "really boot-strapped it," our judges said, when they launched their new business in the condensed smoke industry.

Do you know an innovative company — or is your own company deploying innovation? Let us know! Nominations are open now for the 2019 Insight Innovation Awards.

## INSIGHT INNOVATION AWARDS: Nominations accepted for 2019

The Insight Innovation Awards are designed to encourage innovation among businesses in Northeast Wisconsin that lead to breakthrough technologies, processes and/or company cultures and make an important, positive impact on their companies, employees, customers, vendors, industries, communities and/or the environment.

Award winners serve as examples of best practices in innovation that significantly improve the bottom line, grow the business or heighten employee morale. They may also prove

themselves as innovation leaders in their communities or their industries.

Nominees will be notified of their nomination by Insight Publications and invited to fill out an application on our THINC! website. Self-nominations are encouraged!

Eligibility: Any company based in the 18-county region of New North that has been in business for at least one year as of Jan. 1, 2019. Companies may be headquartered outside of the region, but applicants must have leadership in Northeast Wisconsin.

**WEBSITE:** [www.insightonbusiness.com/thinc](http://www.insightonbusiness.com/thinc)



## WOODA

## PRODUCING FURNITURE DESIGNED BY TRENDSETTERS — WITH A UNIQUE PATHWAY TO MARKET

After 20 years of running a successful custom furniture production company, Black Wolf Design owner and founder Terry Sweeney felt inspired to pursue a more modern, design-focused path that was missing in the furniture industry. That vision led to a new company, brand and product line called Wooda.

For its innovative thinking, the Omro company received an award in the "Product" category. Wooda targets trendsetters and style leaders with a focus on quality and uniqueness. Each Wooda product is manufactured in limited quantity, numbered in sequence, branded and signed by the designer, lending it lasting value.

The contest judges were impressed with the innovative way the company created a pathway to the market for industrial, furniture and décor designers, as well as offering scalability for high-end wood furniture with timelessly modern style.

Wooda targets and recruits industrial designers worldwide to take part by applying online and sending their furniture designs, which, if chosen after a jury process, are produced at no cost to the designer. Upon the sale of an item, the company shares a percentage of that sale with the designer as a royalty. Wooda produces and markets the designs, bringing something new to the market with no risk to the participating designer.

In the beginning stages, Wooda focused on designer recruitment and building relationships within the industrial design community to build a portfolio of products. Going forward, the company is focusing on marketing the brand.

Sweeney predicts the company will continue to grow through the development of relationships with industrial designers worldwide, creating a community of like-minded people by connecting designers, Wooda manufacturing skills and design-driven clientele.



Wooda, an Omro-based business, received the Innovation Award in the "Product" category for working with furniture designers to develop and produce unique furniture pieces. Designers can submit their ideas for furniture pieces and if Wooda accepts the work, the piece is produced at no cost to the designer. When the piece sells, the designer receives a royalty from the sale. Terry Sweeney, Sue Larson and Mack Geggie accepted the honor on behalf of Wooda at the annual THINC! Conference.



### VIDEO ONLINE:

[insightonbusiness.com/events/thinc-2/insight-innovation-award-winners/](http://insightonbusiness.com/events/thinc-2/insight-innovation-award-winners/)

**Click to see a video about Wooda.**

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*— Bob Atwell, Chairman and CEO,  
Nicolet Bankshares, Inc.*

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