

AUSTIN

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The company has 100 employees. Forty of them work at the E. Belmont location.

Their first product, and still a business staple, was electrical meters. Had they not been there to realize the potential of the used light meters, millions of them would have been tossed into landfills. Now they are cleaned and sold all around the globe.

"We sell some 'as is' and refurbish others," Ruth said. "Now we are in the service business. By that I mean we refurbish and remanufacture electrical meters to sell."

Nowadays, Austin sells a wide variety of products such as circuit breakers, switches, control units, meter test boards, electrical tools and insulators, as well as hundreds of other products. Most are sold to industrial companies although they do have some municipal customers in the U.S. They also deal in used and surplus equipment on consignment.

The only item Austin sells to the public is a meter lamp. They use a refurbished meter which still operates. It is mounted on an attractive trophy-like stand made of polished wood and topped with a lamp and shade. The meter rotates at different

speeds depending on the bulb size used. They come in oak, cherry or mahogany and are impressive. Most are sold as retirement gifts or awards. They cost \$100 each.

Austin also deals in electronic boards for different uses, and they are new. The parts are farmed out for manufacture and assembled in Belmont. Because the name of the game these days is automation, the company needed a source for software, so they bought 50 percent of a Raleigh software company. They use the software for testing and refurbishing equipment and they also sell it to utilities.

The company has one electronics engineer and a part-time software specialist they can call on at any time.

"We have made a connection with an engineering firm in the Philippines," Ruth said "We found we needed to do some reengineering on some products and that's why we use them."

Additionally, Ruth and Austin purchased a couple of product lines from companies with whom both were formerly employed. They also purchased a large lot of generators from Homelite at the beginning of the year. Homelite had stockpiled them as part of the widespread Y2K panic.

"As time has passed," Ruth

said, "we've advanced in some areas that make us more profitable. Instead of buying new meter covers, we developed our own molds and now we manufacture our own covers. We use some to refurbish meters here and we sell some to other customers."

Ruth says the company is careful about the items they purchase for resale or refurbishment, pointing out they don't take anything containing hazardous materials.

"We have had an OSHA inspection," she said. "We passed with flying colors."

Ruth functions as executive vice president and handles all inside sales. Austin is president. He and three other sales people travel all over the world visiting customers and seeking new opportunities.

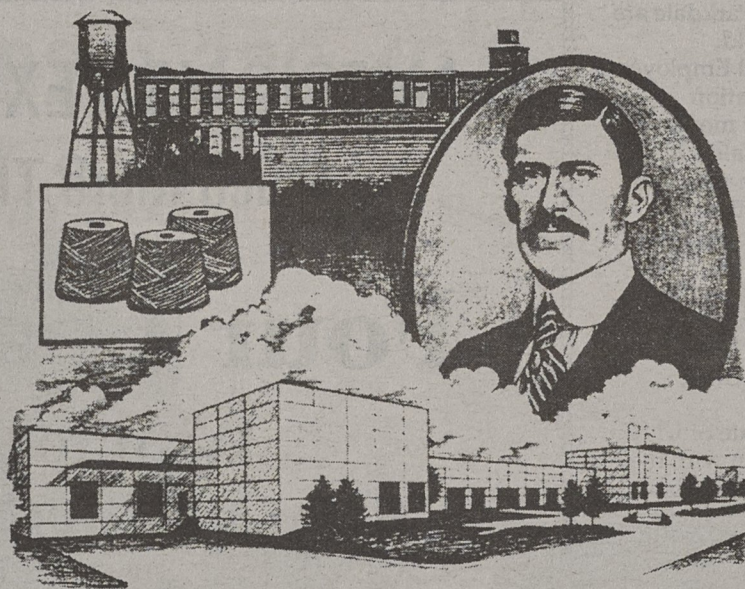
The company has a thick advertising tabloid printed and mails out 8,000 copies a month to their clientele and prospective customers. They also mail colorful flyers advertising some of their products.

Some of their projects bring personal satisfaction. "We acquired a number of used street lights," Ruth said, "and sold them to a small town in the Philippines. The town had never been lit up at night, and when the lights were turned on, the entire town was very proud. That was nice."



FIRST, HORSESHOES — Teddy Blanton (left) and Charles Hash of R.L. Stowe Mills #2 took first place in the Textile Olympics in the horseshoe event held Aug. 24 at Belmont's Davis Park.

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