

Parmerit Inc. | Wolfe Heavy Equipment

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Headquarters	705 Wright Street Strathroy, ON N7G 4L3
Year Established	1988
NAICS	333248 - All other industrial machinery manufacturing, 333110 - Agricultural implement manufacturing, 333130 - Mining and oil and gas field machinery manufacturing
Employees	51
Major Expansions	2011, 2015
Exports	U.S., Asia-Pacific, Australia
Parent Company	Parmerit Inc.
Other Locations	Wolfe - 700 Wright Street Strathroy, Ontario N7G 3H8

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Parmerit's primary focus is on medium to large custom machining and design of automated equipment for the automotive, defence, and aerospace industries. Wolfe, on the other hand, fills the narrow niche of manufacturing trenching and drainage equipment for the agricultural and commercial sectors.

Incorporated in January 1988, Parmerit was founded by its president, Edward Veeke, a tool and die maker by training. Veeke completed his apprenticeship at Armo-Tool Ltd., a Canadian precision tooling manufacturer. During Parmerit's early years, before it was as well-equipped as it is today, Veeke recommended jobs to Armo-Tool; however, over the years, Armo-Tool transitioned to become a customer of Parmerit.

Parmerit grew from very humble beginnings, and its tool shop initially resembled more of a shed than an industrial facility. Despite this limitation, Veeke was able to hire Parmerit's first employee a mere six months after the business was incorporated. As the small company gained momentum, it moved to a slightly bigger industrial facility in Strathroy to be closer to its first customers. Veeke and his wife renovated this new space themselves. Starting the business with only his own mechanical knowledge and skills, Veeke knew he needed to take advantage of every opportunity for growth that came his way. He and his expanding team did exactly that, viewing every new opportunity as a chance to learn, practice, and grow their skill sets. Soon, Parmerit was able to complete the mechanical aspects of its projects as well as the electrical panel building in-house for customers. These new skills allowed the company to grow, and by 2005, it comprised 47 employees.

A heavy reliance on customers in the automotive industry meant that Parmerit was one of the first manufacturers to feel the economic squeeze before the Great Recession in 2008. In 2006, Veeke was forced to cut his team down to only 17 workers. Today, he confesses that letting these employees go was the single hardest thing he has ever had to do. In order to keep the company afloat, Veeke, along with the remaining employees, developed a new strategy. It primarily involved diversifying the business and seeking customers outside of the automotive industry. Parmerit began to target the aerospace, agriculture, and defence sectors, in addition to its automotive customer base. The new strategy required Parmerit to invest heavily in new equipment as well.

As part of its diversification efforts, Parmerit started to build smaller machines for Wolfe, which was, at that time, located nearby in Melbourne, Ontario. While the end of 2010 saw the slowest period that Parmerit had ever experienced, the beginning of 2011 brought it safely out of the slump. As the company recovered from the recession, many former employees were able to return to the company and culture they loved.

Parmerit continued to expand its reach, thanks to its diversification, and quickly outgrew its facility. Accordingly, in December 2011, the company acquired its current location (twice the size of its previous facility) on Wright Street in Strathroy. Around this same time, Wolfe announced that the company was for sale. Veeke took a leap of faith and closed the deal to purchase Wolfe in June 2012. The acquired company was relocated to share the newly purchased and renovated facility with Parmerit.

Veeke worked alongside Wolfe's customer base to update and redesign the plows produced by Wolfe, and new manufacturing processes were put in place. In 2015, Wolfe was moved to its own facility, located across the street from Parmerit. Veeke acquired a wheel business in 2016, thereby expanding Wolfe's production ability to include wheel trenchers capable of digging trenches up to 8 feet deep and 46 inches wide. Further, Veeke took Wolfe to the next level once again with the design of a new dewatering machine, which brings the water table down and allows for construction in swampy locations like Florida. Due to the nature of its products, at present, Wolfe exports 95 per cent of its products to the United States and Australia.

Veeke built his company based on the core values of respect, dedication, discipline, and organization. He notes, "Our team strives for excellence and is our most valuable asset. We create equipment solutions we can be proud of." When walking the factory floors at both Parmerit and at Wolfe, Veeke demonstrates the company's relaxed, familiar culture by greeting employees by their first names, and they greet him the same way. The management teams of the two companies consistently strive to maintain standards that not only impress customers, but also employees. Company culture is truly at the heart of Parmerit and Wolfe's success. As Veeke says, "It is all about 'We'".

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In addition to maintaining up-to-date tools, equipment, and software, and a clean, well-organized, and modern facility, Veeke prioritizes hiring dedicated people with a great attitude. He believes that “your heart has to be into it” to be a good employee and manager. For this reason, Veeke did not push his two sons, Paul and Brian, to work in the family business. However, despite this lack of pressure (or perhaps because of it), both boys were eager to join the company from a young age, beginning as teenagers with tasks like sweeping floors and painting walls before gradually reaching office and management positions.

Parmerit and Wolfe are heavily involved with the local community. The joint companies donate software and steel to the local high schools, and partner with educational institutions such as Fanshawe College and Lambton College for coop programs. Many coop students, after experiencing the rewarding company culture at Parmerit and Wolfe, transition to become full-time employees.

Surviving the difficult four years from 2006 to 2010 made Parmerit stronger, and also led to the biggest advances in the company’s history. For instance, Parmerit’s diversification was one of the main factors that enabled it to survive the recession while so many other firms collapsed. Now, the company’s goal is to further diversify Wolfe, and to explore new foreign markets, such as Australia. The primary challenge with this global expansion will be educating new customers and gaining their trust, convincing them of the value of investing time and money in becoming a product distributor.

Another challenge that Parmerit and Wolfe face is the need for qualified skilled trades workers, especially general machinists and tool and die makers. Veeke believes that in order to overcome the stigma that exists against manufacturing careers in many parts of Canada, it is necessary to educate parents (who in turn can have an influence on their children’s career choices) about the benefits of working in this exciting sector. For their part, Parmerit and Wolfe encourage young people’s interest in manufacturing through generous donations to local high schools.