



Three generations, one vision: How  
the Guerra family transformed  
LEWCO into an industrial  
powerhouse



Jordan Sternberg

The Guerra family includes Thom Guerra, Jessica Tinus, Ron Guerra, (Picture of Tony Guerra), Jerry Guerra, Emily Martucci, and Jude Guerra.



Every Sunday, the Guerra family attends church together, then goes to brunch afterward. They spend holidays together and travel together. This past summer, 40 family members, spanning four generations, occupied a single vacation spot in North Carolina's Outer Banks.

It's a tight-knit family. And it's a tight-knit family that also runs a very successful business in Erie County.



The family business is LEWCO, Inc., now an international industrial equipment manufacturer based in Sandusky. Its roots date back to 1917, when it was first known as the Ohio Welding Company, Sandusky's first welding shop.

In 1955, that small shop hired a young Anthony "Tony" Guerra, fresh out of the U.S. Navy welding school. He thereafter began buying stakes in the company and by 1973, Anthony was the sole owner. In the early 1980s, two of his sons, Ron and Jerry Guerra, joined the business. In 2002, when Anthony retired after 47 years, his sons took over.

And today, Ron's sons Jude and Thom Guerra, and Jerry's daughters, Emily Martucci and Jessica Tinus, team up to oversee the now-500-employee business that 70 years ago once hired their grandfather as just its fifth employee. It's a third-generation family business.

"The proverbial 'Third generation messes it up' is my motivation to work that much harder," says Jude Guerra, vice president of sales and procurement at LEWCO. "We're excited to grow the business to the next level. And by surrounding ourselves with the right team, we're poised to do that. The sky is the limit."



**The Guerra family runs LEWCO, Inc., an international industrial equipment manufacturer based in Sandusky.**

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The word “limit” would seem a relative term to the Guerra family. At one point, the company was “limited” to welding jobs and light manufacturing tasks, including maintenance and repairs at Cedar Point, where to this day one might encounter their work. But Anthony Guerra’s entrepreneurial spirit didn’t really recognize limits. It was all about growth and opportunity.

It might sound odd, but, eventually, the company owned by a hard-working young welder found a niche in manufacturing treadmills used to exercise horses. And they made a lot of them. There came to be opportunities in the automotive parts industry, and LEWCO made a lot of them. Dig into the history of the company, and you’ll discover that when there were opportunities to manufacture a thing, they made a lot of them.

When Ron and Jerry rebranded to LEWCO in 1996, it coincided with the company’s evolution from welding shop to a manufacturer of industrial machinery. It began specializing in conveyor equipment and industrial ovens, the two core product lines to this day.

Everyday consumers might not be in the market for conveyors or industrial ovens, but many people have likely encountered LEWCO’s products whether or not they realize it.

“If you’ve ever ordered something online or received a package in the mail, chances are our products have touched it at some level of distribution,” says Emily Martucci, vice president of Logistiq, a LEWCO subsidiary that grew out of demand for e-commerce solutions. “Some of our customers include FedEx, Ground, Amazon and Target. Therefore, as a consumer, most of the public has used our products indirectly at some point.”

Jude and Thom Guerra grew up envisioning themselves employed in the family business, working alongside their grandfather and fathers, as sons are perhaps wont to do. But Emily, one of Jerry Guerra’s daughters now in the business, did not. She went away to college and had dreams of never returning to Sandusky. She was going into fashion merchandising and moved to Cleveland at one point, as her husband, Mark, was employed at the Cleveland Clinic.

But she came back, not without some deep discussions with her father.

“It took a year of conversation between my dad and me for him to begin envisioning how it would work,” she says. “Again, this was a huge curveball because up until this point neither myself nor my two sisters had really expressed any interest. I think we can both agree now, it was the best decision I ever made.”

Thom Guerra’s path was similar, though not identical to his cousin’s. He had grade-school aspirations of working in his grandfather’s shop, but his father, Ron, steered him toward an engineering career and “highly encouraged” him to work in that industry, separate from the family business. He graduated from college and – perhaps reluctantly? – went to work elsewhere, gaining experience that he now seems to appreciate.

“I wasn’t always keen on it, but I guess as I got older, I saw the importance of it,” he says of the idea of venturing outside the family business. “When he told me that when I was younger, I was like, ‘Yeah, whatever,’ but as I got into college, that’s when I probably realized the value in it.”

Maybe it’s not the sole reason younger generations have ventured into the larger world, then returned, but the commitment to family among the Guerras is strong. Thom goes as far as to say that the brotherly connection between his father and uncle is a big reason for their success. Their ability to work together, he says, has had a lasting impact on the family and its business.

But when the Guerras say “family,” they might not mean just blood relatives. There’s a feeling that there’s a familial connection to the area, too. You don’t, after all, grow a business to nearly a million square feet of space in a place you’re not committed to. You don’t go away to college, then come back to a community you don’t believe in. You don’t hire 500 people on a whim.

“We’re trying to offer the community the best jobs, to be a great place to work,” said Thom Guerra, who’s been gone and back. “There are a lot of great things that have gone on in Sandusky the past couple years, even the surrounding area. We just want to be part of it, provide good-paying jobs and be that staple in the community.”



*Read more articles by Mark Koestner.*

*Mark Koestner is a 50-year resident of Northeast Ohio and a graduate of Kent State University's Journalism program. A former full-time reporter of sports, business and features, he's now a full-time freelance writer, children's chauffeur, and part-time coach of youth sports. Most of all, he's a professional dad. But don't call him Mr. Mom.*

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