

Gore's 50 years of innovation

A company founded in a family basement 50 years ago is now a renowned global enterprise celebrated for unique working culture and product innovation. *CRJ* takes a look



GORE, WHICH BEGAN IN DELAWARE, USA, in 1958 as a wire and cable manufacturer, is now a multi-billion dollar global leader in the fabrics, medical, industrial and electronic products markets.

Perhaps best known for its Gore-Tex fabrics and Elixir guitar strings, Gore manufactures thousands of products and employs more than 8,000 associates in 45 facilities around the world. Despite its tremendous growth over the past 50 years, the enterprise is deeply tied to its roots and the unique business practices established a half-century ago by the late Wilbert L 'Bill' and Genevieve Gore.

FABRICS AND GUITAR STRINGS

WL Gore & Associates' modest beginnings date back to January 1, 1958, when Bill and 'Vieve' celebrated the New Year – and their 23rd wedding anniversary – by launching a business in the basement of their home. With five children to support, Bill had surprised many by leaving behind a successful 12-year career as a chemist with DuPont to explore new uses for the synthetic material polytetrafluoroethylene (PTFE).

In the company's early years, Gore discovered how to apply PTFE tape to insulate wire and cables. These products were in high demand by the mainframe manufacturers of a fledgling computer industry. This successful venture, along with others like it, sparked the company's growth from a modest household business to an international enterprise. However, it wasn't until 1969 – when Bill and Vieve's oldest son, Bob, found a way to expand PTFE – that the company began to fully realise its potential.

With its unique chemical properties, expanded PTFE (ePTFE) opened up a whole new world of product application possibilities for the enterprise, including windproof, waterproof and breathable fabrics; life-enhancing cardiovascular devices; energy-efficient fuel cell assemblies; pollution-reducing filtration systems; and much more.

Today, WL Gore & Associates Inc is recognised as often for its organisational culture as for its innovative products. With the goal of fostering creativity and personal responsibility, the company has evolved with



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a lattice management structure, driven by direct, person-to-person communication.

Decisions are made based on knowledge and experience, rather than by title or particular position. All associates are encouraged to grow in knowledge, skill and responsibility, and to make their own commitments.

With its pioneering corporate culture and market-leading products, WL Gore & Associates Inc has been cited in every selection of the '100 Best Companies to Work For in America' since the list began in 1984.

The enterprise has received similar honours in Europe. Established in the UK since 1964, WL Gore & Associates (UK) Ltd employs around 500 associates across two sites in Livingston and one in Dundee.

WL Gore & Associates (UK) Ltd last year topped *The Sunday Times* '100 Best Companies to Work For' list for the fourth year in a row, and also achieved the number one position in *Esquire* magazine's inaugural

list of the best places to work in the UK.

UK Business Leader John Kennedy said: "Our 50th anniversary is an ideal time to reflect on the innovative and entrepreneurial spirit of Bill and Vieve, and the principles on which this enterprise was founded.

"Their dedication, passion and commitment to excellence created a culture that fosters creativity, and a company that prides itself in providing unique and highly valuable products for our customers."

LIFE-ENHANCING

Bob Gore – Chairman of the company's board of directors since 1986 – is amazed to see how much the company has accomplished since its inception in his childhood home.

"Today, I can say with confidence that we have surpassed even my parents' wildest dreams," he said. "We have created thousands of valuable, life-enhancing products, achieved enviable growth, and have been recognised around the world as a great workplace. I am tremendously proud of the associates' accomplishments, enthusiasm and creativity, as I know my parents would be."

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