





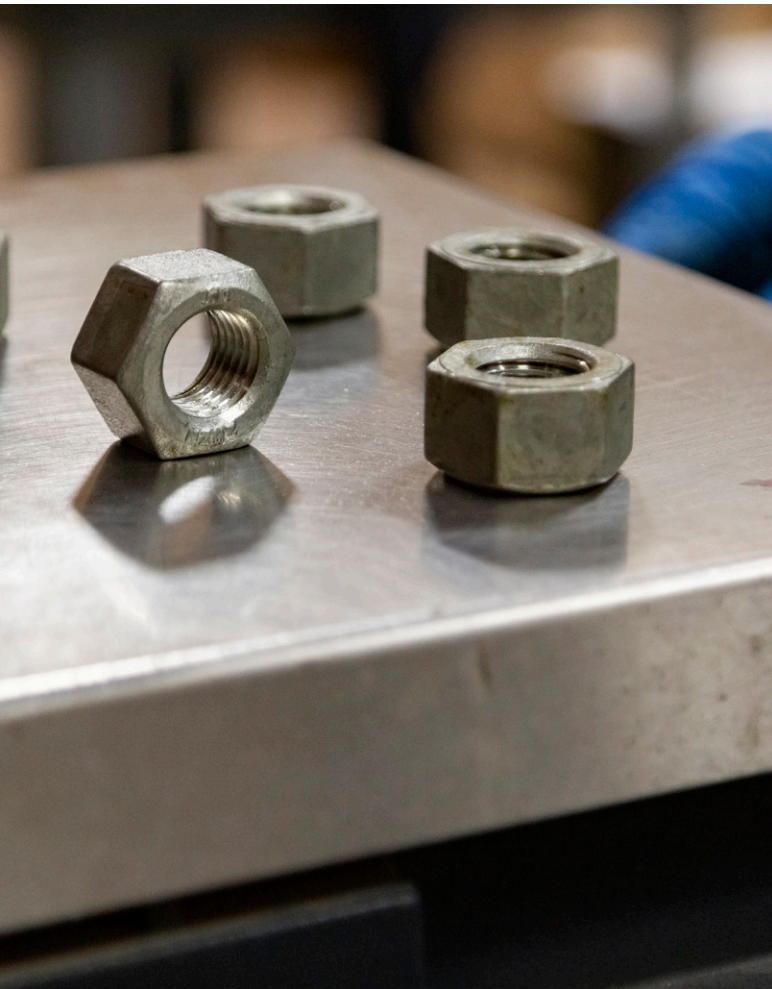
Treating Customers
Like **FAMILY**



Written by Allison Dempsey

When you've been in business for almost 50 years, you learn not only how to keep your company productive and financially successful, but also how to maintain positive and healthy relationships with the people at the core of the business. Second generation family-owned Suburban Bolt and Supply, with four locations and 75 employees, fosters an atmosphere of inclusivity and friendliness, while maintaining its imperative focus on providing exceptional customer service and quality product.

Founded by Jerry Kelley and Carl "Pete" Peterson in Michigan in 1971, the cousins and best friends overcame adversities and steadily grew the business with employees who have been with them for more than 40 years — definitely an impressive accomplishment for any establishment. But it's that dedication and desire to provide top-notch customer service that makes this company truly stand out from its competition. ►►



▶ “Our customers are like family. There’s really no other way to describe that relationship,” says Marketing Director Nikki Gordon. “In 2021 we’ll have been in the business for 50 years which is pretty incredible. Some of our customers have been with us since the early years, and that’s a true testament to our relationship. We really go above and beyond for our customers, and we never lose one. Sometimes we might lose one to a big corporate contract, but within six months they’re back to us.”

Named a Top Work Place by the ***Detroit Free Press***, and the only Michigan business to be featured in Google’s environmental impact report in 2018, Suburban Bolt remains committed to providing premium service to both customers and employees in the upcoming years.

“Jerry and Pete were hardworking guys who refused to fail, and throughout the trials and tribulations were determined to keep it going,” says President Eric Peterson, adding that on the company’s first day in business, Feb. 1, 1971, the office was broken into and all the office equipment stolen. Yet, they persevered. “The bottom line is those two men grew it, and they continued to bring on people through the decades who were special and really cared about the company, and the people cared about them, too. When the folks who work for a company actually have respect and like the people who own it, that definitely helps.”



📷 Jerry Kelley (Founding Partner) and Jerilynn Pintar (Owner-VP)



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Boasting an average employee tenure of 20 years, Suburban Bolt takes pride in its ability to create an atmosphere that is welcoming, productive and family friendly.

"We treat our customers like we treat our employees; like family — we're here to help them," says Nikki. "We position ourselves in the marketplace to help them grow, and our job is to make their jobs a little easier."

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Nikki herself has been with company for two and a half years, and prior to her role as marketing director, handled the company's advertising account. After asking to manage their leads in a marketing position, the company created a job for her, and she now has first-hand knowledge of how Suburban Bolt — who has also been nominated for a work life balance award — helps employees maintain that healthy equilibrium.

"We provide incredible benefits and a great place to work and a culture that is really hard to find for a distributor," says Eric. "Life happens! Our ownership understands the importance of family."

Peterson also affirms the reason Suburban Bolt has managed to stay in business for so long is due in large part to customer loyalty over the past five decades.

"We've had customers that have become friends — we speak to them on the phone and see them in person so often that true friendships develop over the years," he says. "People have been ordering from us for 30 straight years. We're trying to create a real family feeling and I think it's happening!" ➤





► Economic downturns over the years, particularly in 2000 and 2009, brought a sales decrease of almost 50 percent, presenting a huge obstacle for the company. At this time, Owner-Vice President Jerilynn Pinter came on board, and was very instrumental in getting Suburban through some very challenging times, says Peterson. Suburban's sales dipped to less than half of what they had been doing, but, "We got through that and came back, and now we're twice as big as we were."

"I've owned and operated businesses almost my entire adult life," he adds, "and I think just staying in business and keeping the lights on is a pretty big accomplishment!"

Nikki agrees, adding, "Suburban Bolt's ability to adapt and to be nimble is a huge accomplishment. I feel like our employees are adapting to our new technologies quickly. In regard to technology, even though we're a small distributor, we're still on the cutting edge and at the forefront of technology when it comes to our industry and that's pretty exciting! I feel like that's an accomplishment that should be celebrated."

"We're doing things we've never done before and we're adapting to our customers' needs."

With the company's upcoming 50th anniversary on the horizon, there will be festivities taking place, and though nothing is set in stone just yet, it's guaranteed to be a year-long event. Half a century in business is truly a cause for celebration, and the owners reflect on what makes a business thrive.

"A real measure of success is our ability to promote from within," says Eric. "We've been able to do that through the years with our employees, some of whom literally started here part-time in entry level jobs and who are now sales managers, or are running our Virginia branch. We'll continue doing that, and we'll see more promotions from within as we roll out our e-commerce site."

Treating people well and promoting from within while creating a work environment with flexibility to help employees with their personal lives, is an ongoing goal for Suburban Bolt's leaders.

"We all care very much about the people who work here," says Eric. "And we as ownership know we're nothing without the people who work for us. We want to be the type of place where ideally you don't hate coming to work every day!"

Besides the anniversary, another big milestone includes the rollout of the e-commerce site, and the continual upgrading of technology, including the installation of vending machines as an additional facet of CribScan, the company's VMI program.

"We're doing things we've never done before and we're adapting to our customers' needs," says Nikki. "We have a lot of growth opportunities with our e-commerce site — we're going to be able to reach people we've never been able to reach before. We're primarily in Michigan and the Midwest, we do a bit throughout North America, but with the website we'll be able to reach people nationwide and that's huge for us. We're looking forward to 2020 and beyond."

When discussing company growth, Eric recalls a time when there was no recycling program at Suburban Bolt. He started researching more cost effective garbage removal, and realized a cardboard recycling program would not only benefit the company, but the environment as well. They recycle throughout the company now, and have also updated all the warehouse lighting and purchased more energy efficient delivery vehicles. But, he says, there's always room for improvement.

"We can get better at it. We used to be more haphazard when we were out delivering. We have anywhere between six and twelve vehicles out there delivering at any point in time, and if you're not taking the most direct route, you're wasting gas and causing pollution. We've gotten better at being efficient, at making sure the most direct routes are being taken. We've gotten better at technology, as well, to help us with our routing."

And again, even though they're small, they prioritize giving back to their community, donating to a variety of local groups, including Beautiful Me, promoting self-esteem in young girls and women, the Special Olympics, several veterans'

charities, and numerous high school robotics teams throughout southern Michigan.

"We try to give the amounts that we can afford, and we try to give to those where it makes a real difference," says Eric.

Suburban Bolt also works to promote and help local communities, surrounding school districts, and sports teams such as swim and dance teams, and anything that employees' children are involved in. Family is always at the forefront, and Eric is especially proud of the fact that so many members of families work together at the company.

"Of our 75 employees, we have 10 or 11 families who have multiple family members working here," he says. "People want to work here and they want their families to work here as well, a true testament to the culture we've created at Suburban Bolt."

As Suburban Bolt continues its long and proud tradition as a premier supplier of high quality fasteners, cutting tools, abrasives, PVF, shop supplies, and safety products, it will also continue its long and proud tradition of providing a quality workplace.

"The bottom line is we're still in business after 50 years and it goes back to the people who work at Suburban," says Eric. "It's a special group of people. There's a lot of companies doing what we do, selling industrial supplies, but there's no one else quite like Suburban Bolt and the people who work for us." ■

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