

G&H DECOYS

By Ed Godfrey

Takes Pride in Quality Craftsmanship

If it looks like a duck, it was probably made in Henryetta.

Avid waterfowlers know all about G&H Decoys. But few others – even casual duck hunters in Oklahoma – probably don't realize this major manufacturer in the decoy industry is a family-owned business on SH 75 in Henryetta.

"We are less known in Oklahoma than we are worldwide," said G&H owner Dick Gazalski, better known by his loyal customers as "Duck G" because his real name is difficult to pro-



nounce.

The signs on Interstate 40 directing motorists to Henryetta boast of being the hometown of Troy Aikman and Jim Shoulders, but they fail to mention the town's other distinction. It also has the moniker of "The Decoy Capital of the World."

The business started 70 years ago and sort of by accident. Gazalski's father, John, was an avid goose hunter. In 1933, the federal

government banned the use of live geese as decoys.

John Gazalski recognized the need for some type of realistic goose decoy. He envisioned decoys that would stack like pie

plates on top of each other for easy carrying.

He crafted a lightweight, stackable shell decoy from a paper product and began hunting with it. It was much more life-like and easier to carry than the crudely carved wood decoys some hunters were using at the time.

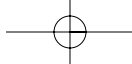
Gazalski made the decoys for his own use, but other hunters were impressed and wanted



NELS ROSEFIELD

MICAH HOLMES

G&H Decoys is open Saturdays through the hunting season from 8 a.m. until 3 p.m., and on Mondays through Fridays from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. The company can be reached by calling (800) 443-3269.



their own. In 1934, Gazalski started producing them from the workshop in his home.

As word spread, the handmade goose decoy came to be known as "The Henryetta." Letters would arrive to the Gazalski home addressed to the "Henryetta Decoy Manufacturer."

Dick Gazalski would arrive home from school and be paid a nickel for each decoy he painted. Dick got his first Schwinn bicycle when his father traded three dozen handmade Henryettas to the local hardware store owner.

The demand for



decoys was so great, the operation was eventually moved to an abandoned sawmill west of town.

John Gazalski obtained a U.S. patent, and his father-in-law, J.V. Hutton, later joined the business, and G&H Manufacturing was founded.

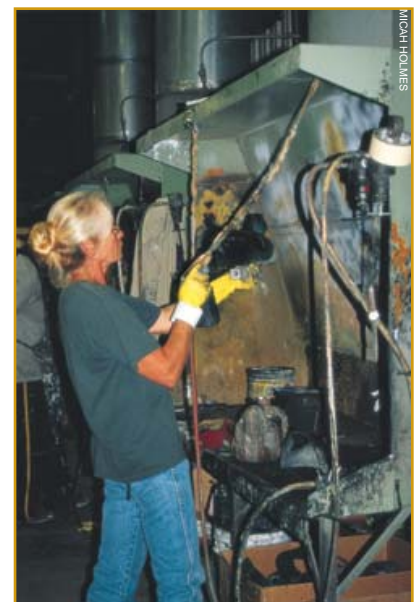
"I remember one day filling a pickup load of decoys and my dad thinking, 'Man, we are going to flood the market,'" Dick Gazalski said. "Before he passed away, he witnessed three semi's out here being filled."

Dick Gazalski, 70, took over the business in 1966 and expanded the operation. Employees helped build the 250,000 square feet plant. G&H Decoys now makes 25 species of waterfowl in 100 different styles.

The factory can produce as

many as 500 dozen in a day if needed, Gazalski said. The company uses 5 million pounds of plastic in a year.

The decoys are patterned, molded, hand-trimmed and painted by the 80 employees of G&H. The employee work force was as high as 140, but Gazalski said he was forced to lay off 60 employees in recent months.



From raw plastic, to a special molding process, to a hand-painted finishing touches, G&H Decoys offers a product any hunter would be proud to own.

Decoy sales fluctuate much like the waterfowl migration from year to year, he said. The competition is getting stiffer, and overseas manufacturers keep cutting a bigger piece of the pie.

Gazalski concedes the imports are cheaper to buy, but contends they are also cheaply made.

"You get what you pay for." said Gazalski.

Gazalski said he's been approached in the past about moving his operation overseas where labor is cheap. But he says he will not leave Henryetta and cheapen the quality of the product.

"What do you want to make a decoy for that's junk? I would rather go do something else."

