

# Allatoona Machinery Co.

PROVIDING RADIAL STACKERS AND BELT CONVEYING SOLUTIONS SINCE 1976

“Like father, like daughter” might be a fitting description of the leadership behind Allatoona Machinery Company in Acworth, GA.

The company was formed in 1976 by Charlie Willingham, who previously owned Willingham Machinery. Thirty years later, in 2006, he hired his daughter, Marianne Gilliam, to help with the marketing side of the business. When he passed away in 2008, she stepped in to fill his shoes, and the company continues under her leadership today.

“My dad originally owned Willingham Machinery, which was more of a manufacturing company,” says Gilliam, who has a bachelors degree in business from Emory University and a masters degree in business administration from Georgia State University.

“But he liked selling equipment more than manufacturing it, so he started Allatoona Machinery Company. He named it ‘Allatoona’ after Allatoona Lake, which is located just a half mile from our office.

“Dad formed a partnership with his friend, Larry Hemminger of Boswell, PA as the manufacturing arm of our business. Early on, Allatoona Machinery sold equipment mainly to the rock, sand, gravel, and concrete industries, but more recently,



Allatoona Machinery Owner Marianne Gilliam (left) and Sales Manager David Spencer (right) with Andrea Bellitieri, JW Jones Company.

we’ve expanded into the construction, recycling, and grain industries.”

## Getting into Grain

“Getting into the grain industry has been revolutionary for us; it’s been

wonderful,” says Gilliam. “With an engineering mentality, Dad was always looking to get into new industries, and he believed the best days for the business were still ahead. He came from the old school of thought that you worked until you dropped.

“In 2005, at age 84, he designed our radial stacker, which really helped us get into the corn industry. For some time, customers had been asking him to design grain conveyors for use in building grain piles or filling storage facilities.

“Dad came up with the idea for the 120-foot stacker to sell to the corn industry. He had to talk Larry into building it at that length though, since Larry didn’t think it should go over 100 feet.

“I joined the company as we were getting into corn and grain, so it holds

*Allatoona Machinery 36-foot-x-120-foot 15,000 bph radial stacker.*



*Allatoona Corn Hog drive-over conveyor receiving system.*

a special place for me, even though it still makes up a smaller percentage of our business than other industries.

“For my Dad, our customer base for years had been rock, dirt, and concrete, so for him to look at a new industry at his age was extraordinary and inspirational. Grain has been a great addition to the company and to our bottom line.”

### **Early Grain Marketing**

“When I joined the company, I had an office next to Dad, and my job was to market our corn conveyors,” says Gilliam. “I started with a directory of people and elevators in the industry, to whom I sent email blurbs with a picture of our 120-foot stacker attached.

“As we started selling some, we also noticed that companies needed a better way to get the grain onto the stacker from the bottom of hopper trucks. So in 2008 at age 87, Dad designed a drive-over conveyor, and we found a manufacturer in Virginia that would make it. But before

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*“About half of what we sell is custom-made, and half is stock product; it just depends on the customer’s situation.”*

*-Marianne Gilliam, owner, Allatoona Machinery Co*

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the first conveyor was delivered, my Dad passed away after a short illness.

“Dad had already sold a few drive-over conveyors before his death. The very first one was purchased by ADM, and we were starting to get more orders. The manufacturer realized he wasn’t going to be able to build enough for the upcoming harvest in 2009, so he told me to stop selling them.

“Then, our manufacturer in Pennsylvania became interested in producing the drive-over conveyors and said that he could make them better and cheaper for us. We switched factories after 2009, and every year since then, the product just keeps getting lighter, faster, and better.

“Many facilities that handle grain need both the drive-over conveyor and



the corn stacker, so we started selling the two products together to many customers. Corn producers throughout the Midwest became really interested in this combo package as a matter of fact. We were selling to Cargill, Consolidated Grain and Barge, ADM, Bunge, De-Bruce Grain, Scoular, Perdue, Hanson-Mueller, and loads of local cooperatives.

“Something that makes us unique in the industry is that we offer both products together at a price under \$80,000. That’s a great deal for customers.”

### **Growing the Business**

“In 2009, I started traveling to meet customers and talk to them about their needs,” says Gilliam. “I drove around Kansas to meet people from coops and other facilities who were buying our products.

“We rented a booth at the 2009 GEAPS Exchange, in order to share our products with potential customers, and that was transformational for us.

“Most of our business is up and down the East Coast, from New York down to Florida, and throughout the Midwest, as far north as Nebraska, and west into Colorado. Freight charges for shipping past Kansas are much higher, so it makes us less competitive farther west.

“We do have the capability of selling internationally, and we have made a few sales, but so far, it is a small part of our business.

“I am in the process of making some training videos and hiring additional sales people to expand our outside sales force.”

### **Both Quality and Cost Count**

“Our products are not expensive, but they are quality pieces,” says Gilliam. “Our manufacturer keeps costs down by buying everything in bulk and working efficiently.

“About half of what we sell is custom-made, and half is stock product; it just depends on the customer’s situation. They might need a particular length, or a special motor, or a unique installation,

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*-Marianne Gilliam*

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and we can supply that. But we also have standard configurations.

“Customers come back to us because of the quality of our products. If you buy an Allatoona conveyor, it will run for 10 years or more, as long as you maintain it. If you change the oil and bearings, it will continue to serve you for many years and hold its value. We provide the same or better value as competitors, but without the higher cost.”

*Shirley Brooks, contributing writer*



*Allatoona Machinery 15,000 bph Drive-Over Conveyor.*



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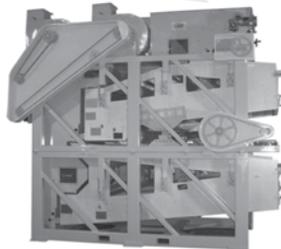
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