

## Tony Getzen and a modern American Brass Making Dynasty

In the present day, it seems all but impossible for a business of any size or significance to last more than a decade or two without new ownership, new direction, and a departure from its original purpose for being. A good example of this would be the famed Jeep automotive brand, which began as a product of Willy's Overland. Willy's became a division of Kaiser in 1953, restructured as Kaiser-Jeep in 1963, was bought by American Motors in 1970, which became a French company under Renault by 1983. American Motors was then bought by Chrysler Motors in 1987, which merged under Daimler to form Daimler-Chrysler in 1998, was sold out of Daimler in to Cerberus Capitol in 2008, went bankrupt in 2009 and emerged as an asset of Italy's Fiat as Chrysler Group LLC, merged with Fiat in 2014 to form FCA, and then was acquired by the French firm PSA in 2021 to form Stellantis, of which Jeep is the most profitable brand.

If one looks at the saga of how the brands of Buffet-Crampon all came to be stencils on a single mega-corp's products, the view is much the same.

However, in the brass-making world there have been many long-lived exceptions - though few have survived the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Antoine Coutois, a company that was on its third generation of the owning family before even picking a name, lasted over two centuries as a family run trumpet maker before succumbing to Buffet-Crampon as now a stencil on VMI trombones. The modern PGM-Couesnon, which is still a family firm and reaches back over a century and a half through the family surnames of Gautrot and Guichard, is another example.

At four generations now, the Getzen companies have achieved dynastic status.



The story of Getzen centers around one pivotal figure in 20<sup>th</sup> century American brass making: Tony Getzen. It is a story of both immigrant dreams realized and pioneer heritage continued. This story is not just a simple one of business risk and success, innovation and influence, and the achievements of four generations, it is the story of a complex family that is integral to the midwestern region it calls home. As Tony's great grandson now sits at the head of the diversified and recombined Getzen empire, it appears destined for a continued role in American musical manufacturing.

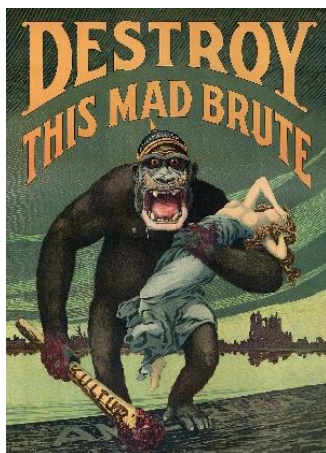
The patriarch of the family enterprise was born Anton James Gietzen on April 10<sup>th</sup> 1894 in Grand Rapids Michigan. T.J. Getzen, as he would later be named, was a first generation German-American at the worst possible time in America to be German. But it seems likely that Tony's struggles with American versus German identity began long before June of 1914 when the assassination of the future head of state of

the Austro-Hungarian Empire by Russia acting through a Serbian agent started the United States population on an irreversible course to ultimately seeking war with the Germanic states of Europe.



Being a first generation American brings with it a set of unique challenges. Not only are there the lingual challenges of speaking one language at home and another in school, etc., but the accent and the cultural differences that manifest in childhood behaviors around others all lead to a sense of not belonging and often a reality of being the target of aggression by “real American” children (many of whom in this case would have been only second generation themselves – but that’s usually enough).


Immigrant parents give up their homes, friends, extended families, and familiar surroundings all in the hopes of providing their children with greater opportunity. Becoming American realizes the dream the parents sacrificed for. However, most immigrant parents were not, and are not, prepared for the cultural disconnects that would emerge as their children did in fact assimilate American cultural and moral beliefs and behaviors. Invariably, immigrants see the cultural values of the United States as wrong when they conflict with the values of the culture in which they themselves were raised. This leads to conflict over morality between parent and child, and great confusion for the child who sees the situation as a case of contradictory mandates: to become American, but not act or think as an American.



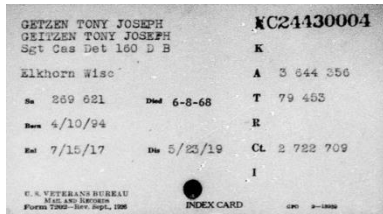
The all-or-nothing commitment of the parents, and their unrealistic expectation that children would have the same level of commitment, couples with the cultural disconnects already piling on top of normal generational disconnects, leading to a very stressful and fractious family situation. It would not be surprising if changing from Gietzen to Getzen was more than simply wanting to appear less German at a time it was prudent to do so, but rather was in fact a rejection of the values mandated in Peter Gietzen’s household that conflicted with those of contemporary midwestern American culture. Perhaps Tony joining the Michigan National Guard at age 17, a year before that would have been a way to identify as American once anti-German sentiments began to brew, was another gesture indicating his rejection of the family for an American identity.

The family identity that Tony Getzen rejected should not be easily dismissed however. The nobility of the sacrifices made for him and his siblings by his father Peter J. Gietzen (9/13/1857 – 6/27/1930) son of John Peter Gietzen (3/10/1807-3/6/1862) who was born in Peterswald, Kreis Zell, near Coblenz, Prussia, and Anna Maria Pauli Siebel (1811-1880), who was born in Woppenroth, Rhein-Hunsruck-Kreis, Rhineland-Palatinate, is worthy of note. John Peter Gietzen’s parents were Jakob Peter Gietzen (10/23/1780-3/19/1847), son of Margaretha (4/23/1788 – 12/8/1845) and Johannes Adam Gietzen (b.1720), the son of Johann Adam Gietzen (b. 3/2/1688), son of Peter Gietzen (2/3/1659 – 1/17/1698),

son of Johann Gietzen (1630 – 1684) and his wife Anna. Leaving that legacy behind and starting over in a strange land where just speaking the language is a challenge, takes great courage and determination.

Tony's mother Martha Meike (1864 - 1938), who was born in Hamburg, Prussia, required just as much courage and determination to contemplate raising what turned out to be at least six children in a strange land. In addition to Tony, these were Peter Jacob Gietzen (1882-1961), Joseph B. Gietzen (b.1883), Felix J. Gietzen, who changed his name to Philip Fredrik Getzen (10/15/1886-1961) and ultimately married Banda (b.1891), Robert Gietzen (9/24/1889 -6/11/1964), who married Petronella (Nellie) Jane Tanis (1/25/1891 – 1980) and whose middle name is recorded in some sources as Matthew, but according to Brett Getzen is denoted as the initial S in family records, and one daughter, Martha  Gietzen (1885-1946), who gave these brothers 10 nieces and nephews with her husband Joseph Peter Rudnick (1878-1948) who was born in the former Duchy of Posen in Prussia, a region that was given to Poland after WWII in trade for the Eastern part of what had been Poland which the Russians never gave back. Robert and Nellie Gietzen would have two children, Robert Frederick Gietzen (1914-1990), and Howard Joseph Gietzen (4/28/1917 – 2/12/2006) who married Lois Yvonne Stone (1922-2011) and had 3 children – none of whom appear to have been in any way involved in the music business.

Tony was not alone in adopting the Getzen name. It appears he may have followed older brother Philip, ultimately living with Philip and Banda in Chicago and working, like his brother, at Lyon & Healy. Philip had a more senior position in 1920 while Tony was an assembler, which suggests Philip may have helped his brother obtain employment. This information comes from Tony's Federal military registration records which indicate both the name Tony James Geitzen and Tony James Getzen. Of note is that he uses Tony, not Anton in both instances, and that Gietzen is spelled Geitzen.



While assembler is a fairly low-level position, it is not entry level. That would be the title of apprentice. According to information provided in the history related at the Allied Supply website, Tony began his apprenticeship at JW York in Grand Rapids in 1913, which is the same year he joined the Michigan National Guard. An intent to leave home before leaving high school may be inferable from these two events, both at age 17. As Lyon & Healy only engaged in small scale manufacturing, purchasing most of its product from stencil houses overseas and local contract manufacturers, apprenticeships there would have been rare. It would be reasonable to assume that Philip probably started out at York as well.

Robert Gietzen also went to work at York, and, much as he kept the family name, he also appears to have remained in Grand Rapids, being listed in a 1916 directory as an "Inspector" at JW York. One may only speculate as to this being a role as a play-tester, or perhaps one in metrology-based quality control, or perhaps even related to the operation of the facility. Given his age of 27, a quality control position would indicate superior musical ability if that is indeed what it was.

In 1917, Sargent Tony Getzen was forced to come to terms with his choice of an American identity in the harshest of ways, when he was called up to service in the US Army from mid-1917 until mid-1919. After 4 years of absolute stalemate on the front lines of the war Russia instigated, with the Russian regime having fallen after the first 3, the United States Expeditionary Force arrived with half a million heavily armed men, and would have ended the war in a matter of days had it not been for the snobbish behavior of the French military commanders who had no respect for the American “cowboys” who were incapable of demonstrating “proper” military bearing through absurd pageantry. American military music owes its professional establishment to this bizarre behavior of the French in that General Pershing had no choice but to replace the volunteer and rag-tag unit bands with professional ensembles (these soldiers had only musical duties from that point on), and conduct a few parades so that he could get the Generals to actually meet with him and treat him as an equal, allowing his troops to be deployed in the field. This is a case where the band won the war – from behind the lines, and in a matter of weeks.

When Tony returned to the United States, he resumed living with his brother’s family and working at Lyon & Healy, but only briefly. Sometime after the census of 1920, shortly according to the History page of the Allied Supply website, he accepted a position of “foreman” at Frank Holton & Co. in Elkhorn. As Holton had only recently (October 1918) relocated from Chicago to Elkhorn, doubtless there were abundant connections to the company available.



This very familiarity though makes it all the more surprising that Tony Getzen was offered a position at Holton. Four years earlier, Philip was personally sued by Holton and other makers alongside local 100 of the Union for engaging in practices violating anti-trust laws. It’s an interesting story from a modern perspective because this predates the National Recovery Act of 1932 which changed collective bargaining from legally amounting to a union conspiring across employers to fix costs and thus prices in a sector of the economy (colluding with the very companies they were striking in the eyes of the anti-trust laws to limit competition in the marketplace - a fair argument), to a protected practice. Apparently, even though he shared an address that was listed in the injunction issued, Holton did not hold Philip’s actions against Tony.

It appears that Tony was successful at Holton, working his way up in position and in collegiality with his coworkers. Reading the Holton Harmony Hints and Bulletin publications, one can see the atmosphere of the Holton Company as one of a pseudo family. These people worked together all day and then socialized together outside of work as well. Those who left the company were still company news when they visited others in Elkhorn socially. From the joking and friendly bits relating to Tony, one can see that he was well liked and respected - an integral part of the Holton family. Remarkably, this did not change in later years when his position of authority forced him to be the person delivering bad news, often.

It took the sleuths of the Advertising Department to solve the mystery of the red Buick. Didn't it, Tony?

(Holton Bulletin, Nov. 1929, page 15)

Tony married Leora Elizabeth Hartwell (2/3/1898-3/23/1960), who had 3 siblings, and came from a well-established family in the region, including Wallace Hartwell (5/25/1839-8/2/1909), County Clerk 1867-1869, and Treasurer 1897-1900. Wallace's wife was Helen Mary Isham, the daughter of a Sugar Creek blacksmith. Wallace was the son of local pioneer Daniel Hartwell (8/4/1801 - 2/19/1884) and Elizabeth Hamilton) Daniel came west from Granville, New York, and was the son of Phipps and Olive. It seems likely Leora's father was a cousin to Wallace. Leora's father, Herbert Eugene Hartwell (1866-1940), was an Alderman, and then Mayor of Elkhorn 1912-14. Following the 1895 addition of city water to the region, he had been named to first city Fire Department in 1897.

The name Hartwell is applied to a major street and a central cemetery in Elkhorn today. Another street is named Getzen.

Leora's mother Edith Louise Wiswell (1869-1914), came from an even more deeply rooted local family, with a heritage reaching back to the European settlement of the continent and the American Revolution. She was the daughter of Philip Stephen Wiswell Sr. (12/30/1844 – 12/28/1923) and Mary Louise Harriman (1846 - 1928) of Geneva Township. Philip was the son of Christopher Wiswell (1/1/1811 – 3/3/1883) and Almira C. West (2/9/1817 – 3/9/1883) . Almira's parents, Stephen Gano West (5/16/1789 – 9/27/1860) and Rebecca Pike (1794 – 1834) were early Walworth County pioneers. Christopher brought the Wiswell family to Walworth from Massachusetts around 1839. He was the son of Capt. Henry Wiswell (6/3/1775) of Newton Mass. and Elizabeth Salter (1780 - 1850), the first Wiswell instead of Wiswall. Capt. Henry's father John Wiswall (3/10/1753 – 12/28/1838), husband of Lois Worseley (b. 1760) was present as a militiaman at Lexington in 1775 alongside his father, 76 year old Capt. Noah Wiswall (9/7/1699 – 7/24/1786) who was wounded in the hand during a skirmish, his brothers, and a total of, according to family lore, 20 members of the family. Noah's wife was Thankful Fuller (1704-1745). Noah was the son of Lt. Thomas Wiswall (4/29/1666 – 7/31/1709) of the Provincial militia, the son of another combat-experienced Capt. Noah Wiswall (12/16/1638 – 7/6/1690), in turn the son of Thomas Wiswall (9/20/1601 – 12/6/1683) who, with his wife Elizabeth Burbage (1604 – 1666) had brought the family from England to the Massachusetts Colony.

Tony and Leora started their family with son James Robert (Bob) Getzen (1927 – 2/12/2003). He was followed shortly by a second son, Donald Earl Getzen (5/15/1928 – 7/8/2017). Don's birth with Bob being such a young age may well have been the reason Tony took a leave of absence from his duties at Holton in 1928. When he returned in 1929, he was named as head of the Saxophone Department.

We are glad to welcome Tony Getzen back to the organization to take complete charge of the saxophone department.

Shortly thereafter, he was promoted to the role of Plant Superintendent, or Plant Manager, depending which source one looks to.

There would be two more children in Tony's family: William Getzen (b. 1933), who married Ruth and became a successful Sarasota Florida attorney, and Carol Getzen, who is not listed in the census of 1940, and was deceased by 2017.

While reaching a leadership position in one of the leading band instrument companies in the world is an accomplishment to be celebrated, Tony probably felt that tempered by the reality of the times. Founder Frank Holton had purchased the failed Couturier company in LaPorte to produce the Collegiate brand of



student instruments (EA Couturier having been a Holton artist and road man 1906-1913, after whom the O bore New Proportion Long Model cornet had been renamed). The Great Depression however was not a brief economic disruption, but a long-term event. Not only would that operation need to be consolidated back to Elkhorn, with abundant lay-offs, but the Holton product line, flush with niche market artist-linked models that cost a lot to include in production yet sold at low volumes, needed a significant pruning to get costs in line with sales revenues. That Tony was able to maintain the relationship he had with his coworkers while taking the necessary actions is testament to his personality.

Tony Getzen made sweeping changes at Holton starting with the 1932 models. Across the catalog, the number of models and options reduced. To keep better track of orders and production, as well as to bin costs for viability analysis, the first system of model numbers the company had ever used was introduced. The trumpet line had recently consisted of traditional wrap Bb/A and C/Bb/A models (very low volume), Revelation wrap Bb/A models in 5 bore sizes, the .485 bore Don Berry model Revelation trumpet, the Gustat model trumpet, the Klatzkin model trumpet, and the best-selling Llewellyn model Revelation trumpet. A Gustat C has also been identified. These were cut back to the ML bore Model 30, medium and small-bore Models 46 and 42, the large bore Model 50 Symphony (pictured), and the Model 32 Streamline peashooter. All were Bb/A models with other keyed trumpets being special order only. By 1937, all that would remain would be the Model 30 and the Streamline.



In 1938, the consolidation continued, with the Holton Model 34 Resotone trumpet (pictured) and a matching Model 24 Resotone cornet being the only soprano brass offerings. The economy rebounded in 1938, and this thrifed, focused portfolio that had allowed Holton to fare far better than most through the Great Depression was inadequate to the sudden increase in demand. What role that may have played in Tony Getzen departing Holton to start his own company is not clear, though an upturn in the economy certainly must have been a motivating factor. The Resotone was replaced by a line of 4



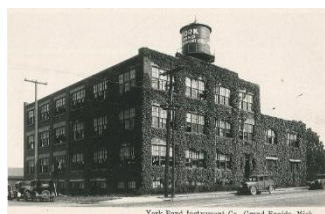
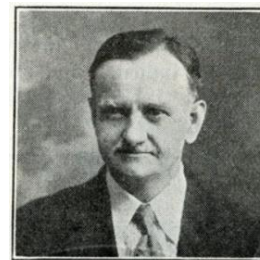
trumpets designed by Arvid Walters the next year. These model 45 and 48 trumpets would continue in several generations of revision up to 1965. Arvid Walters would be Chief Design Engineer from 1940 to 1981.

The Model 30 and its siblings created under Tony Getzen were a pronounced departure from the form of the first- and second-generation Revelation trumpets. The Resotones were even more unique in that they featured a special bell rim that was a hybrid of a traditional German krantz garland, and a French bead. This very central-German aesthetic is notable because it also appears on the Getzen company's first premium models, the Super Deluxe



cornets and trumpets. It opens a question as to who the mentors of Tony Getzen in brass design were. Of note is that Tony started out in the repair department (a common theme in

multiple generations of the Getzen family it seems) at Holton under Walter Schuster, an accomplished Saxon-trained instrument maker in his own right. One may wonder how much influence from Schuster (pictured) is manifest in those Getzen-designed horns.



The other probable influence on Tony Getzen as a maker would be Alfred (Pops) Johnson at the JW York company. Pops Johnson was in the driver's seat in design at York by 1910. All 3 of the Gietzen brothers probably apprenticed under or to him. He is also known as the mentor of Foster Reynolds who played such a key role at HN White before beginning his own firm and ultimately transforming the FE Olds company where Zigmant Kanstul apprenticed to him. Johnson was considered to be a master of valve block design, and is pointed to by many as a key shaper of 20<sup>th</sup> century American brass making.

The York company was also heavily influenced by founder James Warren York's apprenticeship to Louis Hartman and Henry Esbach at the Boston Musical Instrument company. Esbach's work in the 1880s paired with that of Gene Dupont and CG Conn to transition American brass making from the European heritage of rotary valved brass to one of piston valves instead. Esbach also innovated the nested dual tuning slide structure that almost every maker ultimately employed for quick-change between Bb and A. These traditions would have been a part of the Gietzen brothers' training.



When Tony Getzen struck out on his own, his conservative nature that had facilitated the survival of Holton served him well. He opened a small instrument repair business and was thus well positioned when in 1941 the economy again shut down for 4 years due to World War II. His business continued through that stress and when the economy picked up again in 1946, he was ready to start making instruments in his own name – or at least the name he had changed to.

1946 saw the first Getzen trombones, and these were soon followed by cornets and trumpets in 1947. Much like the 3<sup>rd</sup> generation Revelation trumpets he had been responsible for, these instruments were ruggedly, yet responsively built, and had a unique aesthetic quality that set them apart. Selling into a boom in school instrumental music programs that elevated the percentage of the population playing band instruments to what was probably its all-time peak, these reliable, good sounding, and readily recognizable horns were the perfect product. The business boomed.

Both Bob and Don Getzen became accomplished makers under the watchful, and probably a bit demanding, eye of their father. Ultimately, after 10 years at various jobs with the firm, Bob Getzen was named Plant Manager in 1949. That ten years claimed in company histories is a bit of a stretch though, given that he spent 1944-1946 in the US Army.



In 1959, following Tony's decision to sell the company and declining to do so to his sons, Bob Getzen left his father's business and struck out on his own founding Allied Music. Ten years later he would add Allied Supply to his business holdings. Not long after, Tony Getzen sold the company to Harold Knowlton in 1960 who undertook a series of changes to the business and product changes that expanded the company's market share to something resembling that of the present day.

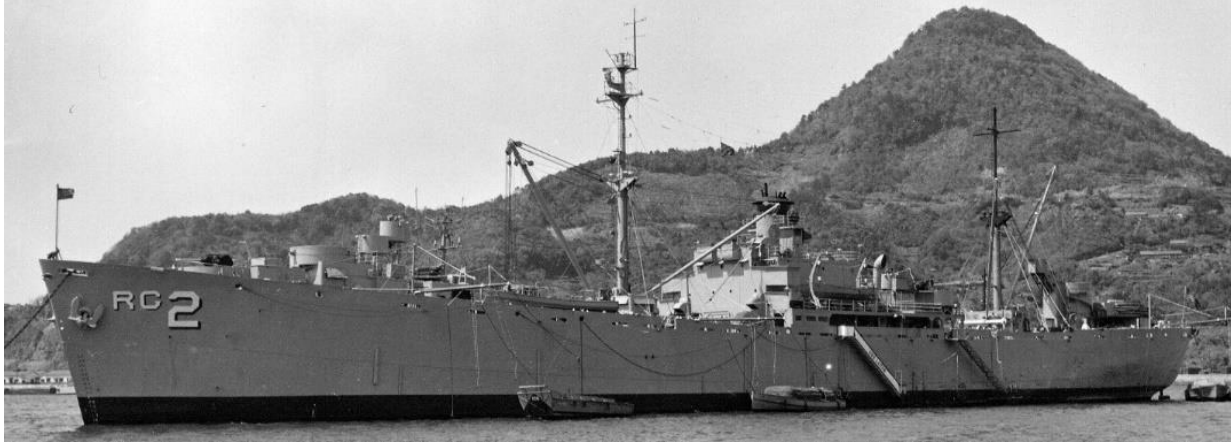
Why Tony Getzen would not agree to the company staying in the family is not clear. It could have been that the two sons had not risen to his standards while working there. It could also have been that they had simply manifested the normal generational conflicts that, given the complexity of his own conflicts with his immigrant father Tony was ill-equipped to understand. Or, perhaps Tony had, despite his Americanization, still internalized the Prussian expectation that every son must strike out on his own and prove his own merit – a tradition that provided 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century German federations with an abundance of determined and hungry for achievement military men, fueling 2 centuries of unification of Germanic post-Roman principalities under the leadership of Prussia.

While Getzen passed out of the family, the sons of TJ Getzen had both inherited the music bug, and both saw great success with their own ventures. Don Getzen founded DEG Music Products, focused on the marching world, in 1965. He reunited with his brother in 1972 when Allied Music was contracted to build instruments for DEG which had previously been built by EK Blessing.



Don Getzen had served in the US Navy for 4 years around the time of the Korean conflict, serving aboard the marine propulsion maintenance ship USS Luzon (formerly the 1943 Liberty Ship SS Samuel Bowles). He and his wife had a daughter Tracey L. (b. 9/17/1962), who married Richard (Rick) T. Gossman (b.1966), and a son Dan who is an avid cyclist, and who was a regional sales rep for DEG until it was sold in 2009. DEG Music Products shut down in 2019.





USS Luzon in Japan

Following their marriage on July 9<sup>th</sup> 1947, Bob Getzen had two sons with his wife Mildred Louise Gilmore (6/23/1928-2/9/2011), the daughter of Willard Lee Gilmore (1898 - 1973) and Jeannette Loretta Zachocki (1896 – 1974), who was the daughter of Joseph Zachocki 1859 – 1920) and Anna Osinski (1864 – 1928). Those sons were Thomas R. Getzen (born June 1948) and Edward M. Getzen (6/17/1950 – 12/2/2019). Like Don and Bob, these two brothers would compete and cooperate to advance the family musical ventures. In 1974 they purchased Allied Supply from their father, and ultimately Allied Music as well in 1988. In 1989, Edward also started Edwards, building first high-end trombones and then professional level trumpets (mirroring his grandfather).



The Getzen company did not fare well outside the family. Beset by fires and an eventual questioning of marketing claims in some professional circles, it held its own, but gradually declined relative to the competition. Seeing the writing on the wall, Harold Knowlton sold the firm to Charles F. Andrews in 1985. By 1991 Getzen was bankrupt.

Apparently, sentimentality abounds in the grandchildren of Tony Getzen, as by 1991 the abundance of destructive mergers and bankruptcy filings that exceeded even those seen at the end of the prior century in the band instrument sector, made investing in instrument manufacturing about as risky as one could find. Of course, with their multi-generational experience and understanding of the business, perhaps they recognized that properly managed, their grandfather's vision could once again be both profitable and of value to the trumpet community. Tom and Ed Getzen decided to buy the assets of Getzen through Allied Music, returning the firm to family control. Then in 1999, Edward Getzen (lower picture) decided to sell his share to his brother, and the combined Getzen/Allied companies came under the sole control of Tom Getzen (upper picture).





But this reunification of all of the branches of instrument making successes that began with Tony Getzen does not end there. In 2013, the sons of Tom Getzen, Brett Thomas Getzen (b. 9/24/1977) and Adam Robert Getzen (b. 8/24/1984), purchased the company from their father. At the time of this writing, Brett Getzen manages the firm as President and VP Adam works by his side. One must admire the courage of their wives, the former Elizabeth A. Guthrie who married Brett and the former Leah Ginean Broyles who married Adam. Past family history makes clear that these brave women didn't just marry their husbands, they married a brass making dynasty that has succeeded where others have failed – probably because it is a family.

Compiled by Ron Berndt, August 2021.

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