



## **Cascade Coil Drapery, Inc. -Backgrounder-**

Located just outside beautiful Portland, Oregon, Cascade Coil Drapery, Inc. is celebrating its 20th year in business, but the history of the family-owned and -operated company goes back nearly a century.

Founded by Eugene Schoenheit in 1922, the business originally focused on fences and was called Pacific Fence and Wire. A German immigrant, Schoenheit began by weaving chain-link fencing by hand. As demand for his work picked up, he conceived of creating fireplace screens as a solid off-season product. His idea was a success, and he branched out into andirons and fireplace toolsets. World War II saw a slowdown in demand due to the shortages of metal for fencing and fireplace screens, but after the War, business soared.

A family man, Eugene was married and had eight children, four sons and four daughters, all of whom were born in Germany before their journey to Oregon. Recalls Eugene's grandson Ronald Schoenheit, now president and CEO of Cascade Coil, "I always wondered why they migrated to Oregon, of all places. But when I visited to Germany to see my grandfather's birthplace, I realized the landscape looked just like Portland."

Eugene's youngest son (and Ron's father), Robert, left high school at age 16 to work in the business, and all the other sons, once they'd returned from the War, also worked with their father. When Robert took over the management of sales in 1952, the company was still selling regionally. But all that changed when Robert opened up the territory to include New York City, Miami and Montreal. A field sales force, marketing literature and mutually beneficial relationships with likeminded vendors – in addition to regional advertising in architecture and design magazines – bolstered the expansion, and sales continued to grow.

In 1960, the company received its first request to "put a fireplace screen in a window." With that idea, Pacific Drapery Walls was born as a subsidiary of

Pacific Fence and Wire. Interior designers, business owners, fireplace shops and others realized the security and design benefits of “wire fabric walls.”

Meanwhile, grandson Ron received his undergraduate degree in mathematics and engineering from Oregon State University in 1965. He was the first in his family to attain his college degree and even now, at age 65, is pursuing his M.B.A., which he’s scheduled to receive in June, 2007. But in the ‘60s, he first pursued job opportunities in Dallas, then returned to the family business. At his father’s invitation, Ron took over the manufacturing operations, applying the systems’ management he’d learned in school. Ron’s father ran the company after Eugene retired, and the factory bustled with cousins, siblings and other family members all running various areas of the business.

In a prescient move, Ron pushed his father to expand the business into glass fireplace doors. After all, he reasoned, they were already successful in the design and manufacture of fireplace screens, andirons and toolsets. Why not glass doors? Robert agreed. It was 1975, right on the eve of the first energy crisis in the U.S. Company sales tripled, to \$10 million, within three years.

Business was so good that in 1977 Robert agreed to split off from Pacific Fence and Wire and create a new corporation, Pacific Fireplace Furnishings, to address the boom in fireplace accessories. In addition, Pacific Fireplace Furnishings, which would eventually be run by Ron, would sell “wire draperies.”

Ten years later, however, Ron was forced to close Pacific Fireplace Furnishings due to a general downturn in the fireplace industry as well as import competition from Taiwan. He says of that time, “Even though the ‘wire curtains’ were doing well, the industry was suffering due to overcapacity and foreign competition. We were in a corner.”

Ever the optimist, Ron had another idea. Mesh curtains, to his eye, “were exciting.” They weren’t seasonal, they weren’t a uniform gray but came in all kinds of weaves and colors, and there was no import competition. “Curtains,” Ron explains, “are ordered at the last minute.” And even though the curtains were all custom-made, customers – architects and interior designers primarily – wanted to have the finished product in their hands within a few weeks. Ron founded Cascade Coil in 1986 and proceeded to do just that.

Cascade Coil’s first big coup was having their wire mesh fabric used on the set of the Rolling Stones’ 1989 Steel Wheels tour. The company was only two years old at that point, but set designers and other forward-thinking designers took note. The company’s products have since been featured on HGTV, *Oprah*, *CSI Miami*, *Will and Grace* and MTV as well as in *Architectural Digest*, *Garden Design* and *Interior Design*. Rave reviews from *Architecture*, *Architectural Record* and the AIA also spurred buzz about Cascade Coil’s versatile mesh fabrics.

A few of Cascade Coil's most exciting projects, according to Ron, include the Marion Oliver McCaw Hall in Seattle, the Museum of Modern Art bookstore in New York, Bobby Flay Steak at the Borgata Hotel Casino and Spa in Atlantic City, Crobar in New York City, the Hilton Tokyo Bay, Wolfgang Puck at the Beverly Wilshire in Los Angeles, the Grand Hotel Esplanade in Berlin, the Seattle Music Experience Project in Seattle and an aviary at the Dallas Zoo.

Looking forward, Ron and his sons, Timothy and Andrew, see expansion opportunities internationally and within the U.S., too, as they consider manufacturing standard-height wire-mesh curtains for off-the-shelf sales in retail venues. And while some home decorators see the wire mesh as "cold," architects and interior designers understand the wide range of uses – from security to enclosures to room dividers and beyond – that the wire-mesh fabric offers. Ron says, "We're very excited about the enthusiasm that the design community has shown – from architects and high-end interior designers to do-it-yourself home decorators."

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Web site: [www.cascadecoil.com](http://www.cascadecoil.com)

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