

Entrepreneur of the third generation:

# Interview with Dr. Dieter Siempelkamp

For 53 years Dr. rer. nat. h. c. (German doctoral degree granted for the sake of the honor = honoris causa) Dieter Siempelkamp's vita has been linked to the company Siempelkamp. He gathered first experiences in industrial production and in the plywood press department. In 1970 he took over the direction of the machine works from his father's hands. As "entrepreneur of the third generation" he developed above all markets in Asia and North America. After his retirement from management in 2003 you can still meet him in his office at the Krefeld location operating as chairman of the advisory board. For Bulletin he has outlined his fascinating career.

By Dr. Silke Hahn



**When did you meet the company Siempelkamp for the first time?**

This meeting dates back approximately 74 years. Already at the age of four I was allowed to accompany my father to his working place every Saturday. I was truly fascinated by the company-owned locomotive and the impressive machining equipment. My father already explained to me at that time: "We build the best presses available." Thus I early learned about conviction and passion for our products.

**Which aspects of the career of your father Eugen Siempelkamp were family matters?**

The company formed part of the family and vice versa. We especially shared my father's business trips that had a different meaning at that time compared to the situation of today. When my father in the thirties for instance went on a business trip to a customer in the United States, it was really a matter of expedition. Today you can fly within a few days, but at that time such a trip came along with his absence for weeks, since it meant traveling by ship.

These travel activities were always shared with eagerness through our family. They really were more important than today because the need for business trips is often obviated due to modern communication channels and technologies. Also the potential of information that is managed today through recent professional magazines and electronic media was not available at that time. Business meetings and personal contacts have always been the basics for a good business relationship – formerly they were absolutely indispensable as the only way to take a direct line to the customer.



Dieter Siempelkamp (left next to the apprenticeship manager at a meeting of apprentices in 1953)

Dieter Siempelkamp with the maharaja of Gwalior in 1960



Wedding invitation



**What was your first task upon joining the company in 1958?**

My father was committed to learning by doing: "Look how I do it, then do it on your own." In 1958 our company enjoyed a boom – at that time we were all committed to keep delivery schedules and to match the organization of the design department accordingly.

This was my first activity before I could dedicate myself to my core business: markets and business trips to our customers. Siempelkamp had always been a very export-oriented company. The forest-rich Scandinavia offered high market potential, Spain, France, Portugal and Italy were also important markets. We especially developed and cared for our contacts to the Russian market – it was already at the beginning of the nineteenth century that my grandfather delivered to these regions. In addition to that there was a demand only in Germany of roundabout 300 customers inquiring our products.

Later on I was committed to the globalization of the company beyond European borders – a strategic issue that my father already pressed. In 1951 he traveled to Brazil and established the close contact to

the Setubal family who founded the Duratex Company still subsisting today. In the United States significant projects were waiting for us; due to the first plywood and chipboard presses milestones were set on our way into the market.

**Which contacts arose from Asia?**

In India for instance we delivered chipboard presses for the production of tea cases in the fifties. Our 4'x 8'-presses met with the requirements of these unusual sizes that such cases were provided with. We were particularly challenged through the bonding process, since it was not allowed to impair the tea flavor by the smell of bonding agent due to possible incorrect bonding techniques.

**Many experiences, many stages of your career. Which was the most important milestone reached with Siempelkamp?**

Several years before my retirement it was crucial to search and find the right successor for me. We succeeded in doing so. In May 2002 we introduced Dr.-Ing. Hans W. Fechner as my designated successor in the position of speaker of

management who should take over the responsibility together with Mr Szukala. In 2003 I finally retired from management. In this case we definitely made the right decision.

**The most interesting encounter?**

I gladly remember four persons. A great experience was the encounter in 1973 with Jimmy Carter who became President of the United States later on. On the occasion of the establishment of our overseas branch in Atlanta he invited our US general manager Ed Steck and me to a reception. As former governor of Georgia he appreciated the new overseas branch as a welcome enrichment of the economic profile of Atlanta. Carter met us in a very open-minded and friendly way!

A longer time ago I met another impressive gentleman. In the sixties I encountered the Maharajah of Gwalior in Bombay. This prince had forests with large resources of teaks. Our task was to inspect the tree population and to check potentials for a



Dieter Siempelkamp and Jimmy Carter in 1973

vener mill. We found precious trees – but unfortunately also “bullets”, since the forest served the purpose of hunting ground for tiger hunt. We recommended that the processing of these teaks should not be considered. Thus we did not make deal from the business point of view. However, in return for the honest expertise I received an invitation to the opulent wedding of the Maharajah's daughter that was celebrated in a palace in Bombay.

#### And the other two meetings ...

... I personally attended to with our customers. I was very impressed by Fritz Egger who laid the foundation in 1961 for the Fritz Egger GmbH & Co. OG operating the first chipboard plant in St. Johann, Austria. Today this company has been producing at 17 locations in Europe and has always been closely connected to Siempelkamp. We are proud of this customer relationship characterized by friendship and mutual confidence.

Olavo Setubal, the founder of the Duratex works in Brazil, was also amazing. This biggest South American maker of wood wood-based panels placed an order in

1951 to my father on his first fibreboard plant. Every time I called on him in São Paulo Setubal senior invited me for lunch. The topic was always the former visit that my father had made at that time and the purchase of this first plant!

#### The most innovative invention/development?

At first the caulless pressing of particle-board was developed at the end of the sixties / beginning of the seventies. Due to this process the solid metal plates used by competitors for transportation and pressing became redundant. Our first invention was the so-called Tray-Belt System. The chips were spread into a container that moved into the press. Upon return the belt was unwound and the spread mat stayed in the press. A very compact and additionally simple solution! We delivered many of these storage container lines to all customers located in Europe.

Later this first concept of caulless pressing resulted in a further development, the belt line. Particles were spread on belts conveying the mat into the loading cage. At that place there were moving tray belts. After loading with chip mats they were entered into the press and the finished boards were ejected at the same time into the unloading cage. During return of the belt trays the new chip mats were placed in the multi-daylight press. This procedure required an initial pressing so that we laid the foundation for the first continuous pre-presses. Owing to the belt conveyors it was possible that large capacities of 1,000 m<sup>3</sup> per day could be produced for the first time.

Another milestone of course is our Conti-Roll®, the reference product made by Siempelkamp. Continuously pressing meant an enormous technological leap. We enabled tolerances that competitors

could only dream of formerly. Where millimeters were ground in that period, today we work within a tolerance of a tenth of a millimeter. In addition to that all other benefits were achieved as to savings of raw material and glue as well as quality improvement.

#### What was different formerly, if you think of research and development?

Formerly new concepts were tried out on site and in cooperation with the customers. Company owners operating lines delivered by Siempelkamp had always been very open-minded and made their contribution to the marketability of the machines. For many years innovations have been now achieved in our own R&D.

It is always very important to emphasize that today we deliver wood-based panel lines that are completely realized through our own production – i.e., all machines are developed, designed and built in our own premises. The teamwork of our manufacturing sites in Germany, China, Czech Republic and Italy is essential for that success. The expertise for instance available in Krefeld for heavy-duty machines is optimally completed by the different competencies of our locations abroad.

Celebrating birthday with a drink from the left to the right: Willi Hoster, Gerhard Hütz, Eugen Siempelkamp, Dieter Siempelkamp, Friedrich Werner





Presentation of the first ContiRoll® press in 1985



Farewell speech as managing director in 2003

### The strength of a family-owned business consist of ...

... the commitment to long-term planning and action. In groups management and strategies often show a shorter duration. Unbeatable properties are additionally short decision-making processes and high flexibility especially when markets are subject to changes. And family-owned companies are nearly all characterized by a deep solidarity with the company and its employees.

### The biggest challenge for a family-owned company consists of ...

... to foster and to preserve at any time the readiness to cooperation and harmony between the shareholders. All family members have to be completely aware of the fact that the company's interest ranks first.

### Siempelkamp 1958 until today: the biggest and most important change?

It is the change that we have triggered during the last years, supported by advisory board and family. We focused on – and still have been doing so – investments in our machinery to a large extent. As a result thereof we have equipment at our disposal that is unique in Germany. Our department for the machining of large

parts is that well equipped that elements with a weight amounting to max. 350 tons can be machined.

Important developments can also be discerned at other pillars of our company: foundry and nuclear technology. There is no larger hand-forming foundry than ours realizing casts with an individual weight of up to 300 tons max. These large elements are required for our large metal-forming presses, but also for other customers that have their casts realized through us. In the market there is no other company that can cast such heavy parts and subsequently deliver them in a finished condition.

Also the nuclear technology sets benchmarks in its market. In this field the name "Siempelkamp" is recognized for exemplary performances in safety technology that throughout the world has been in great demand growing faster than ever. The Core Catcher tested and invented in Krefeld is a central and internationally recognized component of safety concepts for nuclear power plants.

### If today you could start again in your company, what would be your preferred issue to be approached?

Actually the same issues I started with: development of our markets, the close

contact to our customers. It's only the close relationship to our customers including the intensive personal discussions permitting to learn what the market will need in the future. This is crucial for our strategy and for our research and development as well. I would set other priorities as to the sustainable support of our education and further qualification. I have been always committed to this aim within the Eugen Siempelkamp foundation.

**Dr. Siempelkamp, thank you very much indeed for this exciting interview!**

Dr. Dieter Siempelkamp with Gerald Schweighofer on the occasion of the award ceremony of the Schweighofer Prize in June 2011

