

December 1, 1989

Something very special is happening to us this year. We're celebrating our 25th year in business. It doesn't seem so long ago that, on December 1, 1964, I founded HI-LIFE RUBBER PRODUCTS as a sole proprietorship. The business started up in the former Hawthorn-Melody milk plant in Johnson Creek. Our ten-acre property lacked suitable electrical and plumbing services, but the main building was structurally sound, and the price was right. Let's just call it a "diamond-in-the-rough", with the emphasis on "rough". We served a small nucleus of customers with industrial molded goods and rubber office supply products. Setting the stage for the future, however, were a smattering of specialty milker inflations we made in our own-design transfer molding presses. I was the owner, salesman, office manager, chemist, payroll clerk and bill collector. I'm sure I left out some more, too. Let's just say I was very busy.

I was also very fortunate to have my son Reed in the business from the very beginning. He was in charge of production as well as maintenance and shipping. His unique abilities, enthusiasm and hard work enabled us to get-the very most out of our limited budget. We started with a grand total of just seven employees, of which two were Larsons. As I look back, those early days were frightening, yet very challenging and exciting. Here I was, fifty years old and just starting out. I had no way of realizing the many good things that would eventually come our way. As we struggled to get on our feet we felt our best hope for growth was to specialize. We decided to make the products with the most sales potential - milker inflations. We learned the basics of inflation manufacturing with the help of a consultant, but were still lacking in-several key areas. I was again fortunate when my son Leigh joined us in the fall of 1965, even though he had been helping right along in his spare time. As a mechanical engineer he brought us the needed skills of product and equipment design and moldmaking. We then made a company commitment to produce the very finest inflations found anywhere.

Times can be tough for a "new kid on the block". We had few inflation customers and no established reputation for quality or delivery of these products. In fact, we had very few products, and you know a salesman can't sell out of an empty wagon. The decision to have our own line of unbranded inflations helped open the door to our farm store customers. As we made more molds our product line became more desirable, and HI-LIFE began to be more widely recognized as a legitimate source for inflations. We made steady gains in sales which required more people, equipment and building space. Our inflations were now being included in the supply programs of large dairy cooperatives. Our expertise was getting the attention of the milking machine manufacturers, too. Our product design assistance, tooling capabilities, excellent product quality and fast delivery (and favorable prices, too) helped us eventually become the largest inflation manufacturer in the United States.

Along the way we've gained new customers and friends, and attained a level of prosperity so we could share more with our employees. We have enjoyed a stable and growing workforce over the past twenty-five years, and now comprise a company of one hundred employees. We've had our share of heartaches along

the way, too, but that's a part of life which is unavoidable over such a span of time. These years have seen great things happen for our company, but it couldn't have been, possible without our customers, suppliers, fellow employees and most of all, my family. People is what life is really all about, and I've been blessed to have been surrounded with talented individuals who have helped make our success possible.

They say a generation is about twenty-five years long. I'm truly fortunate that my sons chose to join me in the business, and am particularly pleased that my grandson Robert has now joined us, too. My goal was to create a company that would be committed to the ideals of honesty, hard work, fairness and competence, and one that would perpetuate itself. I believe I've succeeded on all points, and fondly look back upon these last twenty-five years as just the beginning. We're certainly off to a great start! Just imagine what good things the next twenty-five years have in store for all of us! Thank you one and all for making it possible.

