Jim Wolf

Avalon & Tahoe Manufacturing, Inc. • Alma

Great leaders lead happy people and, in Alma, those happy people make great boats.

Jim Wolf has been described as a visionary leader by his community, a role model by his peers and, by his own team, the best boss a business could have. He took a floundering business, floating listlessly within the industry, and, in a few short years, reimagined its mission, refocused its attention to quality and craftsmanship and reintroduced it to the world as a brand built around luxury — Avalon & Tahoe.

"Avalon & Tahoe is meant to be about more than just a boat. It's a great brand and it's a lifestyle," explains Wolf. "I was given a great opportunity to take a company that had a lot of promise and potential, make some tweaks, surround myself with an amazing management team and now we're seeing the rewards I always knew we could see. Manufacturing has been my passion for a long time and, when you are at a place like this where the people are right and the product is right, you can move mountains."

In order to move those mountains and position Avalon & Tahoe as the top brand in the industry, Wolf faced a choice — be the biggest or be the best.

"It's a question of quality or quantity and what do we really want our business to be. For me, I never gave it a second thought — manufacturing shouldn't be about pumping out volume, it should be about providing customers with a quality product they can rely on and about developing long-term relationships with them and with your suppliers," said Wolf. "I want us achieving greatness because I know this is a team that can be great and you can't be great if you are sacrificing quality just to get an extra boat out the door."

The mission to be the best shows itself in everything the company does — from the most crucial of decisions to seemingly inconsequential ones.

One such example is the company's preparation for a trade show event early in Wolf's tenure. Expectations were high. The brand was new and fresh. The boats were top quality and tested on the harshest waters in the world. But there was one small hiccup — the tape was on the outside.

"We had these photos of our boats and they had been taped with the tape on the outside — visible to everyone. I said 'no, put the tape on the inside' because we're not going to be the company that takes shortcuts or ignores quality in our products or in pictures on the wall," Wolf says, laughing still as he tells the story years later. "It may not seem like much but, when you strive for perfection, the little things matter — they add up to become what the world sees when they see your logo and hear your name."

As a leader, Wolf sees the people as the make-or-break factor, the difference between good boats and great boats.

"We use the best materials, we make all the components in-house and we're Michigan-made, but I think it's the team here that pushes us up a level," Wolf says. "They understand the expectations of me and the company and what our vision is. They have a stake in the game and, when you have a team like that that you can count on and they share your drive, it makes everything else run better."

His leadership doesn't stop at Avalon & Tahoe's door. Jim Wolf is known throughout the community and, as the head of Alma's largest employer, he fully understands the responsibility.

As the company's representative with the MMA and the Central Michigan Manufacturers Association (CMMA), Wolf pushes relentlessly for solutions to some of the industry's top challenges including the need for more and better skilled trades training programs. In his local community, he is heavily involved with the CMMA, the local area Michigan Works!, the Gratiot Area Chamber of Commerce, Alma College and more. Through his leadership, Avalon & Tahoe also gives back through volunteer efforts and charitable works with the Salvation Army, United Way, Angel Tree, Child Advocacy and Special Olympics.

Wolf, like so many leaders, doesn't view the John G. Thodis Michigan Manufacturer of the Year Award as his award but as a testament to the team he has behind him and the community he has around him.

"Receiving this award made me smile and, if I had to put a word to it, I'd say it gives me a sense of pride," Wolf says. "It made me think the hard work that we've all put into this business is paying off. To get this award, it seals the deal for me that we are great. We'll be better tomorrow, but right now we are great. I wouldn't want to change a thing."



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