



M I S S O U R I
Real People. Real Opportunity.

Leroy Cardwell, President

Novelty

www.cardwelllumberinc.com

If you drink wine or whiskey, there's a good chance it's aged in barrels made in the state of Missouri. With plentiful white oak forests and superb craftsmen, the art and science of "cooperage" is big business here. In fact, Missouri is home to 4 of the 17 cooperage operations in the U.S. and 75 percent of the nation's computerized joiners for making barrel staves. One of those is in operation at Cardwell Lumber of Novelty, Missouri. Leroy Cardwell talks about supplying the world with his products.

"We export to Japan, China, France, Spain, Hungary, and Scotland. I have also shipped to South Africa, and I'll be looking to start some work in New Zealand before too long.

"The computerized joiner is prevalent in Europe where they've been using this type of joining machine for years. They can't use what we call a wheel joiner (used in the majority of barrels made in the U.S.), because of regulations there."

Cardwell talks about how the business evolved.

"I grew up five miles from here as a farm boy, and in 1954 a stave mill moved into the area. We didn't even know what a stave mill was! But my dad had a chain saw, and people wanted him to cut their timber." One thing led to another.

Cardwell went into business with a lumber man from Southern Missouri, and bought him out in 1969. "He took the timber side of the business and furnished my raw material," says Cardwell. "I took the mill side."

A smart move. Twenty years later, Cardwell caught a big break.

"I hooked up with two brothers in Scotland who ran a cooperage. They were looking for headers for their barrels, and we could produce as many as they wanted using narrower pieces of wood. That first year, I made four or five thousand. Last year, I made 120,000.

"Missouri has a good supply of white oak for staves and headers. And Missouri has rainfall. Our customers love the amount of rain we've gotten these last few years. The bad stuff washes out and the good stuff stays in."

There's more "good stuff" happening at Cardwell, in the form of ingenuity. When higher production led to higher energy costs last year, Cardwell turned to a byproduct of the mill to run his kilns — sawdust.

"In January of '09 we had a small kiln and that we ran hard, burning about \$47,000 worth of propane. This year we went pretty near 5 times that, which would compute to \$225,000 in energy costs. But, by burning sawdust instead of propane, we were able to furnish that energy for \$10,000."

Though his business has taken him all over the world, Cardwell prefers his hometown.

"Very few people know where Novelty, Missouri is, so I'm quick to tell them it's near Hannibal. Everybody knows Hannibal. Everybody knows Mark Twain.

"I'd rather be in Novelty than anyplace else in the world. Neighbors help neighbors. Crime is low. Life's been good to me."