

NEYA to honour business founder  
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Byline: Scott Rosts

Moses F. Rittenhouse is well known for his contributions to agriculture. The businessman and philanthropist helped establish the Vineland Research and Innovation Centre, which is located on land he donated to the province to create a centre of excellence in horticultural research in 1906. His name is still synonymous with the site, with the heritage building Rittenhouse Hall still in use today.

Another Rittenhouse descendant, however, also has a long-time association with the agricultural industry. Moses Kensley Rittenhouse, the nephew of Moses F. Rittenhouse, began building orchard sprayers from his barn in Jordan Station, eventually establishing the company M.K. Rittenhouse in 1914. The legacy and business he left behind, still continues today under Rittenhouse Since 1914, located at 1402 Fourth Ave. in St. Catharines. Rittenhouse will be recognized at the Niagara Entrepreneur of the Year Awards (NEYA) on Friday, with a Historical Hall of Fame Award bestowed in honour of his entrepreneurial contributions that he made in the Niagara region. His grandson, Mark Rittenhouse - who ironically shares the same initials M.K. Rittenhouse - says it is an honour for the business and the family.

"Everyone is very proud. This is a family business and it is in Niagara, so to be honoured, and have an award bestowed in his name is exciting," said Mark. For the past 16 years, the (NEYA) has showcased some of the very successful entrepreneurs in the Niagara Region. One of the awards bestowed annually is the Historical Hall of Fame, which is intended to remind people of the entrepreneurial heritage of the Niagara region and showcase the valuable contributions which have brought Niagara to its present level of development. "It's a nice entrepreneurial story," Lisa Cairns, NEYA executive director, said of Rittenhouse's award. "When you look at the Rittenhouse story, he comes from a very entrepreneurial family in itself, such as his uncle who he was named after. I think it's great that the business is not only still running, but it has diversified and is still family-owned and operated."

Before moving to Jordan Station and establishing M.K. Rittenhouse in 1914, Moses' entrepreneurial spirit emerged even earlier, reselling washing machines at McLaughlin Buggies. After seeing a need for agricultural spraying equipment in the booming tender fruit region in Niagara, Moses developed M.K. Rittenhouse.

Despite fluctuations in the agricultural industry, Moses' persistence and ingenuity allowed his business to grow. Through the 1920s and 30s, the spraying equipment he designed and manufactured would run parallel to technology developed in the emerging automotive industry and, in many cases, using the same components found in trucks and airplanes. The business continued to advance over the next 20 years. In 1945, after serving in the Second World War, Moses' two sons returned home to join him and continue the family business, aiding in its expansion by adding a retail farm implement store in St. Catharines during the 1950s. During these decades Moses saw the first of many patents in the areas of pumps and methods of producing and controlling air flow for his spraying machines.

Over the next 40 years, Moses continued to design, patent and manufacture fine agricultural equipment, choosing to grow his business rather than limit it to the tender fruit and vegetable industry by expanding to include the greenhouse and landscape industries. He continued to dedicate his time into his business, and carried on with his passion well into his 90s alongside his family. He died in 1980.

Mark says he is honoured to carry on the tradition as president of the business. He is also proud to see the company continue to advance, with much more emphasis placed on e-commerce over the past decade.

"It's a priority. I was groomed for it," said Mark, adding "it was a bit of a joke since we share the same initials."

The strong brand, said Mark, has been key to the business staying in operation for 97 years, and they hope it will continue to flourish well into the future.

"It's always been focused on quality and being a good brand," he said.

That's just one of the many philosophies that are carried on today by the company, just as the founder followed. In fact, just as Moses invested time in the community outside of business, helping with the establishment of the Jordan Historical Museum of the Twenty, to keep with the community spirit the M.K. Rittenhouse fund was established through the Niagara Community Foundation for the benefit of west Niagara organizations and charities.

The Niagara Entrepreneur of the Year awards take place Friday, Feb. 18 at Sheraton Fallsview Hotel and Conference Centre in Niagara Falls. Also being honoured with bestowed awards are Tom Rankin, Lifetime Achievement Hall of Fame Award; Sandra Murre, Community Contribution Award, and Scott Riesebosch, recipient of the Niagara Original Award.

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