

# MENTOR

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## Made in Mentor

Discover 5 businesses that work  
locally with wide-reaching impact

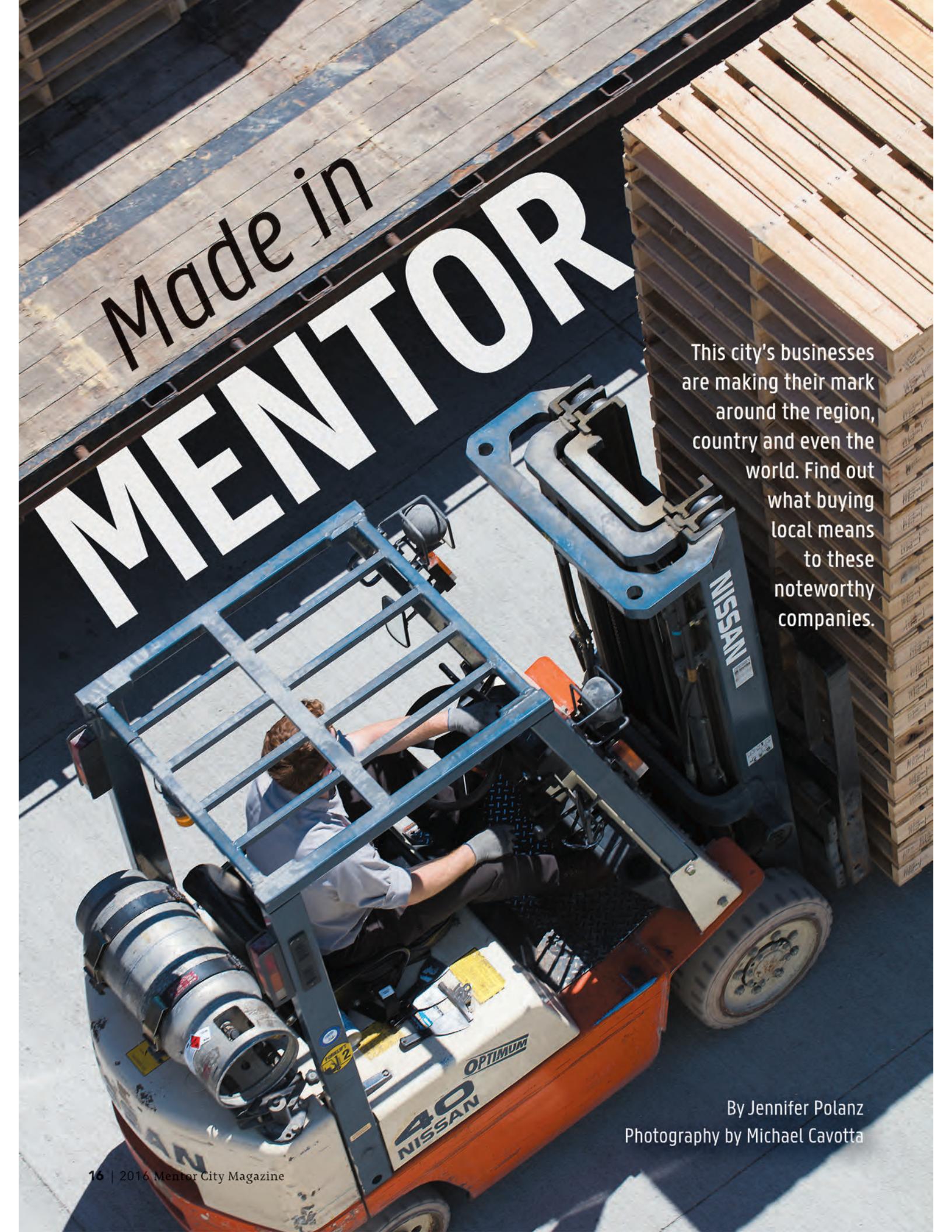
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# Made in MENTOR

A photograph showing a worker in a white shirt and dark pants operating a blue Nissan forklift. The forklift is positioned in front of a large wooden structure with horizontal planks. The word "MENTOR" is prominently displayed in white capital letters on the side of the building. To the right of the forklift, there is a tall stack of wooden pallets.

This city's businesses are making their mark around the region, country and even the world. Find out what buying local means to these noteworthy companies.

By Jennifer Polanz

Photography by Michael Cavotta

**T**here are manufacturing facilities and offices all over Mentor designing and churning out products that we use or are familiar with, but often didn't know came from our own back yard. Examples range the gamut: clothing and accessories, home improvement products, medical supplies and technology, luxury products, labels, and on and on. Here you'll find just a small sampling of these companies and their backstories. Many times, too, those companies started as a hobby, out of a garage or a home office, and then grew over time to what they are today. You may be surprised to find what is made in Mentor.

## ACO POLYMER

Drainage systems often are not top of mind until they fail. ACO Polymer Products on Pinecone Drive in Mentor makes polymer concrete channels for drainage that span a multitude of applications, from roadways, parking lots and garages to playgrounds, pools and sidewalks. In fact, area residents may be familiar with some of their work—the recent drainage improvements made to the parking lot at Great Lakes Mall, for example, as well as drainage channels inside the tracks at Mentor and Chardon high schools.

That just scratches the surface of what products this worldwide company offers. "We try to make things that work for every application," says Brian Parent, director of operations for ACO Polymer. The company has its worldwide headquarters in northern Germany, with two locations in the U.S.: the Mentor facility and one in Casa Grande, Arizona.

Just one example of innovation from ACO is the "Amphibian Guidance System," a tunnel and fencing system for amphibians and other small animals. Parent says issues related to blocking migration routes of wildlife can delay construction projects indefinitely, costing the parties involved. This product is designed to direct wildlife through a tunnel to an underground passage below the roadway. It's an innovative, eco-friendly solution that also prevents costly project delays.

A recent introduction is the ACO StormBrixx, a stormwater management system that connects to form an open bonded structure (Parent described them as similar to LEGOs). They are placed underground, with fill gravel over top, then asphalt can be laid on that. The Storm-

Brixx are strong enough that vehicles can drive over them and rainwater can either filter slowly into the ground through them or the water can be cleaned and pumped back up for reuse.

ACO Polymer Products also can be found in residential applications, and consumers can find some of their products through Menards online, HD Supply and Whitecap. It offers a variety of options for drains, including ADA-compliant ones for showers so a wheelchair can roll right across the threshold.

The company is constantly looking for new ways to innovate, both in the Mentor and Phoenix facilities and in northern Germany. Worldwide, almost 4,000 people work to produce ACO products on five continents. Here in Mentor, the company just moved in to the Pinecone facility about a year ago after needing room to expand. The move from Chardon also opens up an employment corridor of Wickliffe, Willowick and Willoughby, which provides more hiring opportunities as the company continues to fill jobs.

To find out more about ACO Polymer Products, visit [acousa.com](http://acousa.com).

## LÜM-TEC

As with many companies, the story of Lüm-Tec started nine years ago with a hobby. "I had a habit of taking apart watches and modifying them," says president and founder Chris Wiegand. "After many years I discovered a way to make the luminous glow extremely bright. I began offering this service to others. It proved to be very popular."

He continued to modify existing watches and build high-end custom watches until he was able to quit his full-time job



## ACO POLYMER

and become a watchmaker. He began designing his own mass production brand with all the features that customers commonly asked for on their custom watches, including "insane luminous, of course," top-end materials and finishing, special hard coatings, anti-reflective sapphires, exotic materials and more.

He launched the Lüm-Tec brand in late 2007, and initially made 800 watches. Wiegand's company was one of the first established micro watch brands. A story about Lüm-Tec ran in a popular national men's magazine shortly after, and the watches sold out. "The next years we increased production and moved to more exotic materials in our products," Wiegand says. "Each year our quality and product content has grown better and better."

Because of the success of the private line, Wiegand has begun helping others launch their own brands. "Today we manufacture and design watches for brands all over the globe," he says, adding they make watches and watch components for more than 50 other brands.

Wiegand's Lüm-Tec brand stands out from the crowd of high-end, luxury watches because of unique components and a small-batch philosophy. "Our trademarked MDV Luminescent technology is regarded as the best in the industry," he says. "All watches are made only in a small, numbered series and never made again."

It ships Lüm-Tec watches to customers all over the globe, and provides customers with services such as free timing adjustments, battery changes on quartz models, seal cleaning/lubrication and pressure testing for life with each purchase.



## LÜM-TEC

There are six people working out of the Mentor facility. Wiegand does all the design and engineering on all watches, as well as handles production, supplies, brand clients and financials. The company brings on temporary employees who are trained in watch assembly, too, when it has heavy loads, and it works with local shops for machining, coatings, plating and finish work.

Lüm-Tec can be found at 7245B Industrial Park Blvd., where a showroom is open to the public and features every model the company offers. Visitors are welcome to stop in and shop. The watches also are available online at [lum-tec.com](http://lum-tec.com).

## MERRITT WOODWORK

On a quiet strip of Industrial Park Boulevard in a rather unassuming couple of buildings resides one of the leading custom creators of hand-crafted, high-end woodworking in the country: Merritt Woodwork. Its finished product graces the pages of Yachting Magazine and Architectural Digest, among many others, in features about luxurious upscale homes and super yachts around the globe. Its products run the gamut from library bookcases, vanities, full kitchens, master closets and more.

The business started from humble means, says CEO Michael Merritt, who, along with his brother Keith, is the second generation to run the company. Their father, George Merritt, started out building vanities, small kitchens and wardrobes around Cleveland. While he worked two jobs, he learned the woodworking trade from a local Italian cabinet maker. He started the business in Willoughby Hills in 1967, then moved and expanded until he settled in Mentor in the late 1970s. Merritt Woodwork has been in the building on Industrial Park Boulevard for 30-plus years, and it has grown from a 10-man company then to more than 250 employees in multiple locations today. Those locations include Florida, New Jersey, Wisconsin and even Germany, with a new location opening soon on the West Coast.

The biggest challenge for Merritt is finding new employees in what can be considered a dying trade — the fine art of hand-craftsmanship. "We love the city; we love the people," Michael says about Mentor. "We are eager to continue to grow in Mentor, and, like all the craft trades, it's a dying trade."

"The reality is we're creating environments for today's billionaires in some of the most fabulous residences and

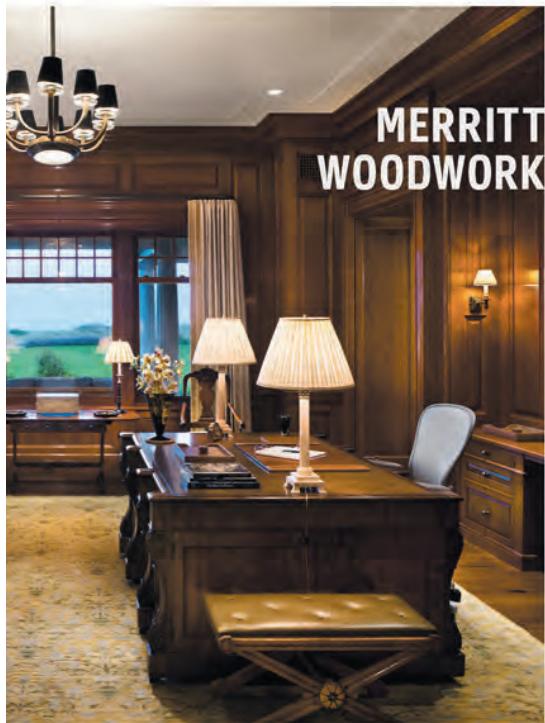


yachts the world has ever seen. We can take eager individuals and teach them."

They have opportunities for growth in everything from manufacturing to engineering and project management. It's a unique opportunity, too — one that could take an employee across the globe to scout for lumber and veneers, or to meet with designers and clients and turn their visions into a piece of art.

The company, too, has a strong sense of respect for the environment. "We are in the wood business, so we are a consumer of wood products but we constantly cherish and use our trees wisely," Michael says. It has outlets for donating byproducts like sawdust and wood scraps so little is wasted.

Find out more about Merritt (and take a look at its stunning work) at [merrittwoodwork.com](http://merrittwoodwork.com).



## DOWNS DESIGNS

Choosing clothing that fits is challenging for everyone, but it is especially so for adults and children with Down syndrome, who have unique needs in clothing, particularly in the length and waist.

That's why Karen Bowersox, whose granddaughter Maggie has Down syndrome, started Downs Designs in 2010 on Tyler Boulevard. "I was hemming her pants all the time," she recalls. "I remember it like yesterday. My daughter Michelle said, 'Why don't you make clothes for people with Down (syndrome).' I went home to look, and there was nothing out there."

She met Jillian Jankovsky, a designer from Akron, and they began to create samples of jeans based on eight models with Down syndrome. The jeans have no buttons or zippers and don't need belts — they have elastic waists with spandex in the denim for flexibility. The clothes are designed in Mentor,



## DOWNS DESIGNS

but made in China. Customers order online, and Bowersox sends samples to try on. The customer marks where they can be hemmed or taken in or out, and then send them back to Downs Designs to finish. The company, which is now a nonprofit, pays for the shipping back and forth.

"They love it," Bowersox says of the try-on service. "They feel someone finally cares how their child or loved one looks. It's really rewarding to see when I send these clothes out they don't want to take them off."

Recently, Bowersox and Jankovsky designed a line called NBZ for disabled adults and children who have difficulty with buttons and zippers. These come in jeans, and are adding khakis and black dress pants because often disabled adults don't have dress clothes to wear for occasions like job interviews. "No one thinks about clothes and how im-

portant they are to get a job," she says.

Bowersox has launched programs like Adopt-a-Jean Friday, where someone can nominate a person to receive a pair of jeans. Individuals and organizations also can donate jeans to people who need them. For example, recently Mentor salon Jenniffer & Co. made a donation that provided 50 pairs of NBZ jeans to the Louis Stokes Cleveland VA Medical Center.

She considers this company her life's work and is hoping to find volunteers to help her in grant writing and event planning for fundraising to keep it going. "We don't think about it," she says of the frustration her customers experienced before they found Downs Designs. "I didn't think of it until it came into my life. Part of our mission is awareness."

Find out more about Downs Designs at [downsdesignsdreams.org](http://downsdesignsdreams.org).