

# WAGO's 40th anniversary and beyond



**TOBY THOMANN**

President, WAGO Corporation

WAGO is celebrating its 40-year anniversary on September 21, 2019. Much has happened over that time starting with a one-man operation and a lot of hard work. While some may think that all that's needed is a great product or leading-edge technology, it's more than that. It's the people that make it successful, and they work hard to get there. To get a better feel of its history, Toby Thomann, President of WAGO Corporation, answers several questions about WAGO's history in North America, introductions of some of its industry-changing products and related technological developments now and in the future.

**Q:** Happy 40th anniversary to WAGO. What brought WAGO to the United States 40 years ago?

**A:** We started in September of 1979. At that time, it was a one-man operation. Our German parent decided it wanted a North American presence. The gentleman who came to the United States two Presidents before me was Michael Lane. He built the company out of a suburban Milwaukee, Wisconsin office. Our current headquarters is located in Germantown, a northwest suburb of Milwaukee. Today WAGO employs about 225 people in the United States.

**Q:** Having started at WAGO 25 years ago as Regional Sales Manager for Ohio, Michigan and western Pennsylvania, you have been closely involved with WAGO's growth and expansion over the years and played a part in its success. Any words of wisdom on how others could achieve that same level of success?

**A:** There is no easy path. It's just a lot of hard work and dedicated people. That's what makes our organization great. It's the people that make us succeed, not in just the United States, but globally. There is a lot of tenure here. Many of the salespeople have been here as long as I have, which is great for our customers, as well. Long relationships—building them and maintaining them—are key to any suc-

cessful organization. That trust and reliability is built from the ground up, over time.

These days, everyone wants the quick hit. They often don't want to spend the time; they seem to want everything now. When I hire people today, I know it's a different world, and we try to change to meet those expectations.

The biggest thing I see with young people coming into our company is that they notice how many employees have been here for 10, 15 or 20 years. I point out that it is one of the things that makes us special as a company. We are looking for people that want to have a career with us. And they can if they want to spend the time and put in the work.

It's something that is earned, and there is a pathway to success. They asked me how I got to be President. There is no simple answer. Whatever role I had, whether it was Regional Manager, Zone Manager, Marketing Manager, National Sales Manager, or Vice President of Sales, I continuously worked to lead by example. No task was too insignificant, nor too big. However, one person cannot do it alone, I was fortunate to surround myself with colleagues who aspired to those same goals, which helped me – and all of us – to succeed.

**Q:** What are some of the major milestones as WAGO grew over the years?

**A:** The milestone that really changed us was in 1995 when WAGO introduced the first modular I/O system to the marketplace. Up to that point, everyone had PLC- and rack-based I/O systems. We introduced the first fieldbus-independent I/O system. It was modular. You could put slice I/O together and build a system the way you wanted.

I recall when we introduced the WAGO-I/O-SYSTEM, representatives from Rockwell and Siemens were standing in our trade show booth acknowledging our industry-changing platform. We knew then that we had something revolutionary. It changed the industry. Everyone uses similar technology today.



## COMBINE PEOPLE AND TECHNOLOGY

WAGO's North American headquarters is located in Germantown, Wisconsin.

It is similar to what happened previously when we introduced our spring-based technology. Our parent company introduced the first spring connector in 1951 when WAGO was founded. That spring-clamp technology was further expanded with the introduction of the CAGE CLAMP in 1977.

When I started working at WAGO, we were the only company who used spring-based technology in all our products. And we still do today. There are still no screws in any of our products, and we firmly believe that it is the best technology in the market. During my early years at WAGO, there was a lot of “missionary” work trying to convince customers that this type of technology was better than what they were used to—inserting a wire and tightening a screw.

The CAGE CLAMP revolutionized the industry. It gave users more options and expanded their capabilities going forward. It has evolved in many variations over the years.

Another milestone was when we introduced our push-in technology around 2001. It was the first push-in terminal block where the wire can be inserted directly into the terminal block. There are many other connector milestones also worth noting. Our 773 series (WALL-NUTS) are a replacement for traditional twist-type connectors. We were

the first to introduce this push-in, solid and stranded wire connector for the contractor market. And our latest invention is the 221 series LEVER NUTS, which has also changed the marketplace. We sell hundreds of millions of these connectors each year.

**Q:** What are some past and future visions you have for WAGO, and how have you met them?

**A:** I remember in 1995 when we started talking about smart terminal blocks—the WAGO I/O-SYSTEM. We described our product as no more than a smart terminal block that we were going to change the market with. Up to that point, WAGO was perceived as only a connector company. Our vision was to change WAGO from that perception of us as a connector company to that of an automation company. We are still evolving as an automation company and we will continue to do that as we go forward.

WAGO is a company of firsts. We always try to develop new products that change the market. We did that with our CAGE CLAMP and the WAGO- I/O-SYSTEM technology. In the next 18 months, we are introducing new technology that we believe will change the market yet again, and, if not, it will at least challenge our competitors to compete.

Our vision is to always innovate and provide our customers with leading-edge technology. With the expansion of cloud connectivity and digitalization, we have to stay focused on what the customers are telling us and work to provide the latest and greatest for them.

**Q:** What technology will lead you to your next anniversary?

**A:** One of the exciting things from my standpoint when working with WAGO is that there are always new products being developed. As a salesperson, I always had something new to talk about, whether it was some new technology or dynamic product offering that opened new markets for us. We look for paths where we can innovate and enable our customers with products that simplify their lives.

As we look toward our 50-year anniversary, we know that the digital world is going to continue to push us. To be on the leading edge of that technology, I think we need to address the many needs of cloud connectivity and cybersecurity. There will be many new technologies, such as MQTT-based Sparkplug, Docker and OPC UA, and the flexibility they provide our customers. The fact that customers are embracing these technologies is pushing us to the next level.

When a customer comes to us, we want to say, “Yes, we can do that for you.” The WAGO-I/O-SYSTEM is still one of the most dynamic control platforms on the market, and it provides us the opportunity to meet customers’ ever-changing digitalization requirements. We support 20 different networks in our system. Not many manufacturers have that capability. As we continue to evolve, you’ll see WAGO’s technology grow further.

For more information about WAGO products, interconnection technologies and fieldbus-independent I/O systems, please visit [www.wago.com/us](http://www.wago.com/us).