

Generations



Summer fun made in America

By Peg DeMarco, Special to the News Herald

In a 2015 survey by Consumer Reports, nearly 8 in 10 respondents said they prefer to buy American-made products and more than 6 in 10 said they're willing to pay 10 percent more. So, I thought I'd take some still "Made in USA" products and compose a summertime camping story for illustration.

Let's start with an important outdoor staple: a charcoal grill. Look no further than the Weber Grill whose black rounded shape hasn't changed since it was first designed in 1952. We all had them growing up before gas grills took over so I know most of you will recognize them. They're still manufactured at the company's headquarters in Palatine, Illinois.

Getting the grill lit is still done with a Zippo lighter, which was first made in 1933 in Bradford, Pennsylvania, and they are still manufactured in the same town today. The reusable metal lighter company is now an iconic American brand selling its products around the world.

And for those interested in tossing a football around before enjoying a hot dog or hamburger off the grill, you'll be glad to know that a Wilson pigskin football is still handmade in America. As the official supplier of footballs to the National Football League, more than 4,000 leather footballs are produced daily at the company's facility in Ada, Ohio.

Sitting around the campfire is fun with someone strumming a Gibson guitar, which is still fittingly based in Nashville. The company, founded in Michigan more than a century ago, now manufactures its guitars at factories in Tennessee and Montana.

And there's no better accompaniment to the guitar to sing some good, old Americana folk songs than the strummer wearing a Stetson cowboy hat. Founded at the tail end of the Civil War, Stetson is now the only company to produce cowboy hats entirely in the USA, and it's also one of the largest hat manufacturers in the nation. Still a cornerstone of Western lore, millions of Stetsons are produced each year in the company's 9-acre Philadelphia plant.

For those that want to take a hike after wolfing down a couple of hot dogs, no other brand manufactures as much athletic footwear in the USA as New Balance. Each year, the company makes more than 4 million pairs with at least 70 percent domestic materials.

After the hike, grab a cool drink from an Igloo cooler. Igloo's products still come from a 1.4 million-square-foot facility near Houston.

Teens might want to play a game of Wiffle ball while they wait for their burgers. The popular game was invented in the 1950s by a former semi-pro baseball player who wanted to help his son avoid injury while practicing. His invention became a staple of backyard fun and little else about the company has changed. The products are still cheap for a bat and three balls, the dimensions are still the same, and manufacturing operations are still done in Shelton, Connecticut.

To ward off mosquitoes and other critters, check out the Chesapeake Bay Candle Factory's citronella products. The company is based in Maryland and churns out more than half a million scented candles each month.

To keep the kids busy and creative while you set up the campsite, provide them with poster-size paper and packs of Crayola crayons. Every art supply sold under the Crayola label is manufactured at the company's flagship factory in Easton, Pennsylvania. An average day's production totals 13 million crayons alone, but the company also produces colored pencils, chalk and paint.

For sunburn, don't forget to pack Burt's Bees products. The company sells about 200 skin- and hair-care products with an environmentally friendly approach from its headquarters in our own North Carolina. Although now owned by Clorox, Burt's Bees still manufactures lip balms and ointments with minimal processing or additives.

Another staple for the youngest camper who may be in a tent for the first time (my youngest was two) is a favorite cuddly toy. Nothing quiets a nervous youngster down faster than a soft bear from the Vermont Teddy Bear Company. Its two factories produce nearly half a million bears each year using recycled cotton and they're guaranteed for life. My brother had one and passed it down to his eldest, even though it had lost an eye along the way.

And, finally, for those of you who decide to trade in the camper for a motorcycle, you'll be proud to know that motorcycle giant Harley-Davidson is still headquartered in Milwaukee and remains an iconic part of American biker culture.

Hooray for products made in America!

Peg DeMarco can be reached at pegdemarco@earthlink.net.