

MADE IN LAKE
Saluting local companies with national reach



THESE BOOTS KICK @SS!

Eustis' Ridge Outdoors walks the walk when customers talk, helping it to thrive in a competitive market.

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Chances are, if you're in law enforcement or the military, you own a pair of Ridge Outdoors footwear. The Eustis-based company produces 20,000 pairs of boots per year along with other footwear products, including rubber-soled sandals, Oxford shoes, socks, and massaging insoles.

MADE IN LAKE



"Our largest markets are police, firemen, and EMTs," says Jeremy Granger, vice president for Ridge. "We have some mechanical and industrial clients, but the business we are best at is military and law enforcement."

Ridge Outdoors provides many styles of boots, including black and brown tactical boots, waterproof and blood-borne pathogen-resistant boots, and motorcycle boots. The company also produces a

The Eustis facility is the company's headquarters and serves as the main distribution center for products that are shipped worldwide. In addition to U.S. markets, Ridge footwear also has large markets in Australia, Chile, Brazil, Canada, Germany, and Saudi Arabia.

Ridge Outdoors was founded in California, but in 1996, Eustis resident Rob Granger and his then-partner Roy Baker bought the company. The long-time

"Roy is the one who brought the idea to the table," remembers Rob. "He asked if I'd like to do something different. I was sort of stepping outside the box...with boots."

Rob serves as company president and owns Granger-Carter Construction Company, while Roy eventually took a buy-out to do other things. The new face of the company is Rob's son, Jeremy, whose videos on the company's website tout

because of its comfort and durability. Rob says the company has to be continually innovative because there is so much competition for the boot market. Staying competitive with pricing also means the products are mostly manufactured in China, Taiwan, and Vietnam.

"We wish we could build our products in this country, but there is very little footwear production in the U.S. Less than 5 percent of footwear is

"We want a good-looking product, but comfortable product for people who

- Rob Granger

line of lightweight shirts, called "packin' tees," that are big sellers among undercover agents, police, and security personnel who often must carry a concealed weapon.

friends and Eustis High School graduates knew that to run the business successfully, they would need to bring it home to Lake County where they both had other interests.

the benefits of Ridge Outdoors footwear. The company is the innovator of the tactical boot air heel system, which many competitors have tried to imitate

manufactured here," says Rob. "Look at your other major names, like Nike, and you will see they also manufacture their products in those same countries."



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Early on, Ridge Outdoors offered some hiking products, but the company decided to focus on the black boot market.

"People don't realize how much fashion is tied to the hiking industry," explains Rob, who wears boots often but not every day. "We want a good looking product, but at same time we want to focus on making a comfortable product for people who are going to be on their feet all day."

Jeremy came into the business in 2007 after selling his own business.

"My dad and his partner were looking for young blood to bring in new ideas," says Jeremy, who handles the company's marketing and sales.

One of his ideas came to fruition in 2008 when he helped develop a Guatemalan Mission-Ridge Outdoors partnership. Boots that cannot be sold are sent to the Central American country.

"Most of the locals have no shoes or just one pair that has to last years, so the donated footwear is appreciated," says Jeremy. "We supply mostly new

gear but even shoes that have been returned or have slight defects are much better than anything they would normally get to wear."

Not only are the boots given to Guatemalans in need but also to five native pastors who spend their days traveling by foot to local communities for ministering and helping. Ridge supplies the pastors with footwear that helps them be as comfortable as possible while walking hundreds of miles each month.

Rob believes his son's

youth brings a different kind of insight to the company and that they play off each other's strengths.

"Jeremy and I had years of being in a great relationship, long before he became involved in the business," says Rob. "We might not always see eye-to-eye, but the lines of communication are always open."

Between 500 and 600 retailers carry Ridge products, and the father-son duo hopes to see Ridge Outdoors become even more of a nationally and internationally recognized



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name in the black boot market. First and foremost, their ultimate goal is customer satisfaction.

From the reviews on retailers' websites, such as

Amazon, the company is well on its way to achieving that goal: "These Ridge boots are the best I've ever owned. I've worn everything from

combat boots to cowboy boots and motorcycle boots," said reviewer Joseph E. Donahue III of Wesley Chapel. "They are waterproof, supportive,

and comfortable. Best of all, they weigh no more than a pair of good running shoes."

ANOTHER RIDGE SUCCESS

PACKIN' TEE

Among Ridge's most popular items is the "packin' tee" concealment shirt, which is a big seller with undercover agents, police officers, and security personnel who carry a concealed weapon.

