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HMI has engineered and fabricated tank-loading systems that allow a single truck operator to load, deliver and set up a tank storage system without the assistance of additional machinery. (PHOTOS PROVIDED BY OCAST)

# BIN THERE, DONE THAT

Coalgate's Steve Cody finds a niche in building innovative farm implements



**COALGATE —**  
There was a time in the early 1980s when Oklahoma's oil economy resembled California's gold rush of a century earlier. Thousands of people rushed in with the hope that oil would make them rich.

Steve Cody left his Southeastern Oklahoma ranching business in the 1980s to make his fortune in the oil boom. But the boom went bust by the late '80s, and so did Cody.

"I got in the oil field service business during the oil boom in the '80s and ended up busted," Cody said. "I went back to ranching."

For a creative, ambitious Oklahoman like Cody, ranching didn't provide the lifestyle he desired.

"I needed outside farm income," Cody said.

So he identified a need for bulk feed storage on farms and ranches across southeastern Oklahoma and created a business to meet it.

Initially operating as Cody Bin Co. in the winter of 1989, Cody began building overhead feed bins, eventually changing the name to Heavybilt Manufacturing Inc. (HMI), which the company is known as today.

"The timing was perfect, being plugged into the cattle business and knowing feed companies and other farmers and ranchers," said Cody, now 71. "I didn't know it when I started, but it was a really good



HMI employs about 35 people in Coalgate.

Go to [Oklahoman.com](http://Oklahoman.com) to see a video about Coalgate-based Heavybilt Manufacturing Inc.

business and came together well for me."

Heavybilt has emerged as a manufacturer known for its bulk storage bins, hay trailers, pasture sprayers, portable feed trailers, belly dumps and other agriculture implements. Cody even ventured back into the oil and gas industry with a Heavybilt line of oil storage tanks.

Heavybilt employs about 35 people who operate from about 60,000 square feet of manufacturing space on the eastern edge of Coalgate. The Heavybilt brand is marketed by a sales team, through trade shows, on the internet and through dealers in 15 states.

Today, Heavybilt manufacturing is a nationally recognized brand for its distinctive farm implements and a new line of grain storage bins built especially for the craft brewing industry.

Cody's ability to identify an industry problem has led the company to expand its product

lines and manufacturing capabilities over the years. That's exactly how Heavybilt connected with the craft beer industry.

"I saw a need for it because it was obvious they were using these tanks," Cody said. "We started advertising in places where they advertise and research their products. From there we started going to trade shows. Now, we deal with consultants who go out and build these breweries. It's a pretty big community now and a growing industry."

Cody also has developed patented products, including a seismic stabilizer for oil field storage tanks. He designed it in conjunction with an engineering firm in Tulsa after earthquakes in the northern part of Oklahoma became routine.

Along the way, Heavybilt established a working relationship with the Oklahoma Manufacturing Alliance (OMA), which provides advice and education for the state's small manufacturing businesses. It was named one of four winners of the OMA's Governor's Manufacturing Leadership Awards for 2014.

"They have promoted us and given us recognition in ways that we didn't

have before," Cody said. "Of course, there is a technology connection, getting with people who have ideas and methods for manufacturing that we didn't have. So, it's helped us grow, for sure."

Cody and his team work closely with Kay Watson, the Ardmore-based OMA Manufacturing Extension Agent for Southeastern Oklahoma. Watson cited Cody's ability to identify customer needs as a key to his company's success.

"I work with a lot of small manufacturers in southeastern Oklahoma, and I can count on one hand the ones that are like Steve, who are innovative and see either a way to do things different, better or they see a customer need," Watson said.

For Steve Cody, that vision has meant expanding into the craft brewing business and developing a special "belly dump" gravel hauler, among other innovations. More is on the way.

"I think stainless is probably on the horizon for us," he said. "Most people don't want to do it and there is a learning curve, but there is a demand for it from oil field chemicals, breweries and wineries."

So, how did this old cowboy who failed in the oil field services business build such a successful manufacturing business in Coalgate, OK?

"If you look for the need you will find it," Cody said. "So that's what I've tried to do — anticipate what the customers need."

Jim Stafford writes about Oklahoma innovation and research and development topics on behalf of the Oklahoma Center for the Advancement of Science & Technology (OCAST).