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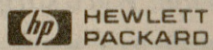
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Resistol company survives hat craze flourishes in trade

GARLAND (AP) — Al Luiz says he's glad the urban cowboy craze is over.

"Our business is not like it was during the crazy years," he says. "It's back to normal."

For Resistol, a leading maker of cowboy hats, the late 1970s and early 1980s were hectic and heady times.

Everyone in the country wanted to wear a cowboy hat, says Luiz, vice president for manufacturing. And Resistol was the cowboy hat that John Wayne and Lyndon Johnson wore. Today it is the hat of choice for Ronald Reagan and "J.R. Ewing."

The company's 50-year-old suburban Dallas plant was on double shifts trying to keep up with a demand that was almost twice that of today's annual 500,000-hat production.

Finding enough materials — the beaver, rabbit and wild hare skins that go into felt hats and the woven imported forms that are shaped into straw hats — was difficult, Luiz says.

He says the quality that makes Resistol the headgear of choice among real Texas cowboys probably suffered during that time, too.

Originally developed by a Texas immigrant from New York City in the 1930s and marketed as "the most comfortable hat ever made" with a "sweat-proof" band, this Texas icon fell on hard times for a while when the urban cowboy era ended.

"When it died, it died suddenly," Luiz says. "It was like somebody turned off the light. It really hurt us for a long time."

But after the company's Western store customers sold down their overstocked inventory, Resistol was back doing what it does best, serving its core group — the working cowboy.

It is found in thousands of U.S. Western stores, racked under the roofs of tens of thousands of pickups driven by working cowhands, and on the heads of hundreds of thousands of spectators at rodeos across the West.

"The guy who makes only about \$100 a week working on a ranch will go out and pay two weeks' salary for a good beaver Resistol," Luiz says. "The people who know Western hats will always buy a Resistol."

Ranging in price from about \$45 for a summer straw standard to \$5,000 for the top-of-the-line chinchilla felt version, Resistol hats are made to order on decades-old machinery at the sprawling Garland plant.

"None of these machines has been made in 25 or 30 years and some of them are much older than that," Luiz says.

Resistol has its own machine shop to fabricate parts to repair those machines, as well as its own print shop with more than 45,000 separate customer dies, he says.

It also has its own fur-cutting facility in Newark, N.J. — a port location to receive imported skins from Canada, Europe and South America — and a fur-forming plant in Longview where a water supply is plentiful.

Up to 150,000 gallons of water are used daily in the process that converts fur into the shaped felt forms that are shipped to the Garland plant to be made into finished hats, Luiz says.

The woven forms that are made into straw hats are imported directly from South America, chiefly Ecuador, Luiz says. The weaving process, he says, can take half a day for a standard straw hat to as long as six weeks for a fine Panama.

Resistol also makes a wide variety of dress hats in Garland. "About the only kind we don't make are top hats," Luiz says.

He says the plant's inventory includes about 8,000 different trim items and more than 2,000 separate hat styles.

The 400 or so employees in Garland are paid on a piecework basis used throughout the garment industry in which the more a worker produces, the more money he makes, Luiz says.

The Resistol workforce is stable,

and many employees have been with the company 20, 30 or even 40 years. "We had a woman in her 80s who retired last year after working for the company something like 60 years," Luiz says.

Resistol had its genesis with Rolnick, who after growing up in a Jewish neighborhood in Manhattan

moved with his family to the early 1900s. By 1917, the Rolnicks were operating a hat renovation shop in town Dallas. In 1926, with a stake from a Dallas family, Rolnick founded a company to make hats.

A year later, Rolnick and a retired machine parts man took over the firm, renamed Byer-Rolnick Co. and went into business with \$100,000 in capital.

Rolnick began marketing guaranteed Resistol brand hats in the 1930s. His patented interior band allowed for expansion and contraction without contact with the hat's sweaty brows it created.

The 1936 Texas Centennial inspired Rolnick to begin marketing Western hats. Although the line grew up only about 10 percent of the line in the early 1930s, Rolnick was going head-to-head with the legendary Stetson.

The St. Joseph, Mo., hat maker still is a nemesis, but Rolnick doesn't like to talk about the competitor, Luiz says.

"We try not to say anything about Stetson — it's almost generic," Luiz says. "When a tourist gets off the plane in Texas, the first thing he wants to buy is a Stetson."

But Luiz reiterates that he and Rolnick know Western hats.

Rolnick moved the plant to downtown Dallas to a 50-year-old building in 1938. It boomed, and by 1953 he was producing a million hats a year.

In 1968, clothing manufacturer Koret of California bought Rolnick, and in 1979, Leno and Co. purchased Koret. Irving Joel of Richmond bought Resistol and added Dobbis, Churchill, Adam and Fog hat line.

Company policy has kept Resistol's reputation strong for years, Luiz says. "You can't buy a Resistol hat except in a Western store," he said. "Most of the better stores are exclusively Resistol."

The company is active in promotion, and it has strong ties with the entertainment industry. Rolnick put Resistol on a map by convincing movie stars Wayne and Glenn Ford to wear Resistol hats.

"There's some romance in hats, and that's part of the business," Luiz says, noting that Rolnick fitted Linda Gray and Larry Man for their "Dallas" hat. He took Bo Derek on a plane and she picked up her special bowler.

While Resistol is interested in procuring its materials, it generally is confined to the States, Luiz says.

"That could change with ownership," Luiz says.

"There's no telling what Joel will do," Luiz says. "The strongest marketing man I've seen with Resistol in recent history

MANAMA said its war plan Tuesday night and oil terminals in the Persian Gulf before a U.N. embargo.

The official said two "large" ships which usually hit at 9 p.m. to identify the vessel independent near the Gulf.

Iraq's annual number since Aug. 29. Before the six-week period, U.N. cease-fire.

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Tyler football player struck by lightning during daily practice

TYLER (AP) — A high school football player was struck by lightning on Tuesday afternoon and was taken immediately to a nearby hospital, officials said.

A hospital spokesman said Michah Zapata was listed in critical condition.

Zapata was practicing about 3:20 p.m. with the junior varsity of Tyler Robert E. Lee High School when coaches and staff began to worry about the weather conditions.

Coaches ended the practice and told players to get inside when a bolt of lightning struck in the area of the practice field.

But another bolt struck practice field before the could get to the dressing room officials said.

It was the second bolt that Zapata, he said.

Six other team players were taken to Tyler's Medical Center after they complained of headaches following the lightning strike.

The players were held in a parent storms in the area before lightning struck.