

Bronner Family



The Bronner's FAMILY CHRISTmas WONDERLAND was started by the grandson of Johannes Bronner. Wallace "Wally" Bronner was a teenager when he became a sign painter in 1945. Today his family corporation is the world's largest year-round Christmas display, attracting more than two million visitors annually.

Wally started his business in his parents' basement and had his first experience decorating display windows at his Aunt Hattie Hubinger's grocery store. Soon other local businessmen gave him sign and display work. Wally attended Saginaw Business Institute. He married Irene Pretzer June 23, 1951. That same year he got a golden business opportunity while trimming the windows of a hardware store in Bay City. Merchants from Clare, Michigan watched him work and entered the store looking for Christmas decorations to display on their city's streets. The store had none for sale, so Wally offered to make Christmas panels for the city's lamp posts. Clare officials liked the decorations so much they placed a second order for the next year and Wally was in the Christmas decoration business.

Accounts were quickly developed in several states. By the fall of 1954, Wally's father Herman built him a headquarters at 121 East Tuscola, on a lot next to his Aunt Hattie's store. The Bronners added a line of Christmas decorations to be sold directly to stores as well as others for shopping centers, parking lots, malls, commercial interiors and churches. By 1960 Christmas decorations and gifts for the home were included. When the city of Frankenmuth wanted an official crest designed, Wally served on the committee. This project led to the development of a separate business – Bronner's Screen Printing, Inc. Later it was renamed Memtron Technologies and was sold in 1984.

By 1963 a second story was added to the Bronner building. Two years later Wally and Irene began the direct importing of Christmas merchandise.

They purchased the vacated bank building across from the main showroom and converted it into a "Tannenbaum Shop" in 1969. After "Aunt Hattie" died, the couple purchased her grocery store for a third showroom and called it "Bronner's Bavarian Corner". The area at Main and Tuscola Streets became so crowded with customers that doormen were hired on weekends to manage the long lines that waited to get in. It was inevitable that the Bronners would have to consolidate their business under one roof. The couple purchased 50 acres of land south of town and sold their three separate locations in 1975. A separate Bronner's Screen Printing building began business on the new site in 1976.

The sprawling one-acre Christmas showroom opened June 8, 1977. It included another acre for warehouse and office space. The Alpine-style CHRISTmas WONDERLAND has a showroom with more than 30,000 different Christmas trims. The store is organized along three different themes – religious, traditional and toyland. There are more than 500 different types of Nativity sets, 3000 different styles of glass ornaments including personalized ones, and 600 animated figures. In 1983 a multi-media presentation with 670 slides and 500 feet of movie film entitled "The World of Bronner's" debuted and has already been viewed by more than 250,000 visitors.

In 1986 Bronners became the first recipient of the "Golden Santa Claus" award at the International Toy Fair in Nurnberg, West Germany. In 1985 the American Automobile Association (AAA) named the business one of the top ten man-made attractions in Michigan. The National Ornaments and Electric Lights Christmas Association (NOEL) presented Bronners with the "Retailer of the Year Award" in 1982.

In 1976 the governor of Michigan designated Bronners as an "Embassy for Michigan Tourism". Wallace "Wally" Bronner had 81 wonderful years on earth and on April 1, 2008 he entered heaven and now has an even better life with his Lord and Savior for all eternity in the heavenly mansions.



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The family business has been transferred to the Bronner children. Wayne Bronner is president and CEO and his wife Lorene is salesroom manager. Daughter Carla (Bronner) Spletzer is vice-president and her husband Robert Spletzer is human relations manager. Daughter Maria (Bronner) Sutorik is also a vice-president and is in charge of marketing, while her husband Christopher Sutorik supervises all of the display work inside and outside of the operation. Another son Randall lives in Arizona and is not involved in the business.

The salesroom has been expanded several times and now covers an area the size of two football fields. The entire building covers five acres. The commercial department consists of four full-time sales representatives who call on cities, parks, businesses and malls for decorations. The website is very active and thousands of items are on-line, plus several million catalogs are mailed out each year as well.

As a tribute to God for His many blessings, the Silent Night Memorial Chapel was built in 1992. Visitors from over 100 countries visit each year. The history of the song is displayed in the chapel and the first verse of "Silent Night" is displayed on plaques surrounding the chapel in 300 languages.
To God be the Glory!



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