

## Mike Frisbie – Frisbie Construction

This is Kansas Profile. I'm Ron Wilson, director of the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development at Kansas State University.

Culbertson, Nebraska. A state-of-the-art grain handling facility is being installed, with the capacity to unload 105 railroad cars at a time. The innovative construction company which is installing this new grain handling facility is found in rural Kansas. It's today's Kansas Profile.

Mike Frisbie is President and Chairman of the Board of Frisbie Construction, the company which is building this new facility. The company began in 1949 when Mike's father George Frisbie came back to his hometown of Gypsum after World War II. George started building houses with carpenter's hand tools and a wheelbarrow.

In 1954, at the request of a friend in Salina, George Frisbie built a concrete slip form elevator in Gypsum. That would make the elevator 60 years old. Is it still standing? "I can see it through my office door," Mike Frisbie said.

In fact, it went so well that Frisbie Construction now specializes solely in building and remodelling elevators for the grain trade. Mike studied electronics and worked for other companies before joining the family business. He became President and Chairman when George Frisbie retired in 1992.

The business has grown and changed. "When I got started, a machine which could move 8,000 bushels per hour was a big piece of equipment," Mike said. "Now we are moving 50 to 70,000 bushels per hour," he said. "Our customers may have only 36 to 48 hours to sample and weigh a bunch of grain cars."

Frisbie Construction designed new products to assist in that process. One is the Frisbie swivel rail loadout spout, which is like a series of funnels to direct the flow of grain. Another is the Frisbie unloading augur, which is a tubular augur that controls grain flow. Systems have become automated and computer-controlled. Bearings now have monitors, for example, so a technician can identify problems immediately.

"We build new elevators and we speed up old ones," Mike said. "If you're selling grain, you need to move it more quickly," Mike said. "If you're storing grain, you need more storage." Either way, Frisbie Construction can help.

Frisbie Construction maintains a manufacturing plant to build new or hard-to-find replacement parts. "We are one of two companies that do 24 hour a day, 7 day a week emergency repair," Mike said.

Today Frisbie Construction serves primarily a five-state region centered on Kansas. The company maintains eleven crews of two to four people who travel to jobs in the region. "My crews are here at 7 a.m. Monday and are back late Friday," Mike said.

Along the way, the company has learned lessons for success. "My dad said, take care of the customers and take care of the employees," Mike stated. In one of the early years, a crew took a brand new pickup truck to a jobsite and proceeded to damage the truck by overloading it on its very first time out. Ouch.

"After that we made a commitment to owning our own cranes and getting the equipment we need," Mike said. "We want our employees to work smarter and longer. Safety is a big part of what we do."

He also recalls a time when there was a steel shortage. Frisbie Construction had an exclusive relationship with one particular supplier who could not get steel, even

though it was available otherwise. “Now we work with all dealers,” Mike said. “Our goal is to build the proper elevator for the customer, not a particular brand we might be trying to sell.”

Some employees have been with the company for 30 or 40 years. The company is jointly owned by family and employees. “We’ve had a great run of good people here,” Mike said. It’s great to see a business thrive in a rural community like Gypsum, population 409 people. Now, that’s rural. For more information, go to [www.frisbieinc.com](http://www.frisbieinc.com).

It’s time to leave Culbertson, Nebraska where a new grain handling facility is being installed by an innovative company from rural Kansas. We salute Mike Frisbie and all those involved with Frisbie Construction for making a difference with entrepreneurship in the grain handling industry. They have demonstrated how rural America can gain by handling grain.

For the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development, this is Ron Wilson with Kansas Profile.