

Case Study

The Eldora Project

An interview with Dan Oswald

A beneficial partnership between the Iowa Prison Industries (IPI) and the Iowa Economic Development Authority sought to implement a deconstruction program that would benefit the environment and prisoners in Iowa. Spearheaded by Dan Oswald, prisoners from the North Central Correctional

Facility in Rockwell City, Iowa were trained in classes taught by Oswald that included carpentry, deconstruction and safety. Once a prisoner finished these classes, their newly learned skills were utilized in an actual deconstruction project dubbed The Eldora Project. In all, over 130 prisoners have been enrolled in the program.



During the process of deconstruction, Oswald noticed the prisoners were enthusiastic about salvaging as much material as possible. In addition to being able to divert material from the landfill, Oswald states the prisoners really enjoyed the work and were proud of the results while learning job skills that would benefit them once released. During the process, Oswald was able to teach the prisoners how to identify hardwood lumber and deconstruction projects that will be valuable and worthwhile. With deconstruction contractors in high demand, the team could afford to be choosy about the projects they worked on.

The IPI bought all of the deconstructed lumber that resulted from *The Eldora Project* to repurpose into furniture built by prisoners creating a scenario where the entire program became self-sufficient. Some prisoners made furniture ranging from dining room tables, chairs, end tables, headboards and much more. The furniture they built was picked up by members of their families to be taken home or became available in a furniture line called The Eldora Line.

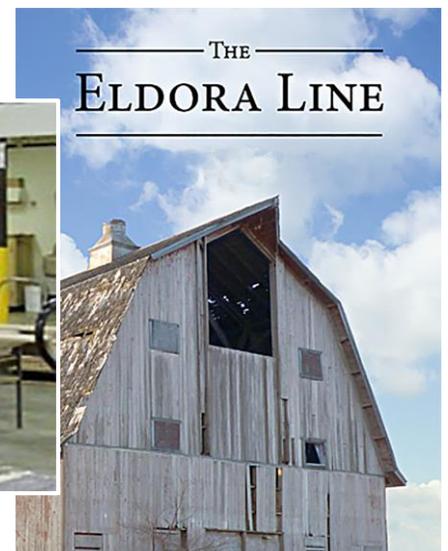
The IPI office in Des Moines currently houses a showroom where these fine furniture pieces can be inspected for purchase. Customized furniture can be ordered, but standard pieces such as a conference table, credenza or an occasional table are regularly available. The Eldora Line can be viewed at the following IPI website:

<http://www.iaprisoinind.com/store/pg/133-Eldora-Line.aspx>

The Perfect Location

With the prisoners trained, Oswald just needed the perfect location and he found it in what was once called the Boys Training School. Now known as the Eldora Correctional Facility, its long history began in 1868 and included residence houses, classrooms, a hospital, workshops and a number of large barns and outbuildings that made up a working farm. Over the last few decades, the barns and outbuildings began to deteriorate as the farm operation was discontinued. Oswald knew this would be the perfect location for prisoners to apply their newly learned skills and get hands-on experience in deconstruction.

In the summer of 2012, Oswald began taking prisoners from the North Central Correctional Facility to the Eldora Correctional Facility where deconstruction on many outbuildings and barns was started. In all, over 20,000 board feet of dimensional, rough-cut, hardwood lumber was salvaged from the structures.



The University of Northern Iowa and the Iowa Waste Reduction Center are an equal opportunity provider and employer.

Eligible Customers

Furniture from The Eldora Line is not for sale to the general public. Below is a list of the types of customers the furniture is available to throughout Iowa.

- Tax-supported state, county, and city agencies
- School districts
- Non-profit organizations such as churches, fraternal organizations and parochial schools
- Employees of any of the above institutions or organizations

Out-of-state institutions or organizations have additional requirements to purchase.

- Prepay for orders plus all shipping charges
- Contact needs to be made with the home state correctional industries first to see if they can fulfill the order prior to ordering with IPI



Challenges

Oswald comments that the deconstruction industry is not without challenges. Deconstruction contractors in the area are scarce, which makes it difficult for people to find contractors willing to spend the time salvaging renovation material. However, once material is deconstructed it can be difficult to find markets and willing buyers to purchase the materials. Many times the lumber salvaged out of old corn cribs, barns, schools and buildings is old growth, hardwood species that are much denser than material available today. Oswald explains the quality of the material warrants salvage and reuse, and as the word gets out about deconstruction as an option to demolition, he expects the market to increase as it has on both the east and west coasts.



A Win-Win Situation

The future of deconstruction projects between the IPI and the Iowa Central Community College looks positive according to Oswald. He would like to see more collaboration with a permanent partnership to benefit prisoners in acquiring job skills in deconstruction and carpentry while reducing construction and demolition material going to Iowa landfills. He believes any project that works to promote deconstruction, while reducing construction and demolition material going to the landfill, is a great place to start.