

# TECHNOLOGY TODAY



## HANWHA TECHWIN HELPS INNOVATIVE GROWERS EQUIPMENT STAY AT THE TOP OF THE HORTICULTURE MARKET

BY SMT TODAY EDITOR



*Founded in 2016 by Chris Mayer and Bruce Zierk and headquartered in Sycamore, IL, Innovative Growers Equipment (IGE) is known as the premier equipment supplier to commercial growers throughout North America that specializes in building custom “Made in the USA” Ebb & Flow greenhouse benches, matching expanded metal benches, grow racking systems, airflow solutions, lighting and more while providing essential equipment and supplies for growers of quality plants throughout North America. All benches, plant support systems, rolling and stationary racks are custom made to fit customers’ exact needs. Additionally, its staff has a significant amount of industry of combined industry experience in designing, engineering, and building innovative solutions and products.*

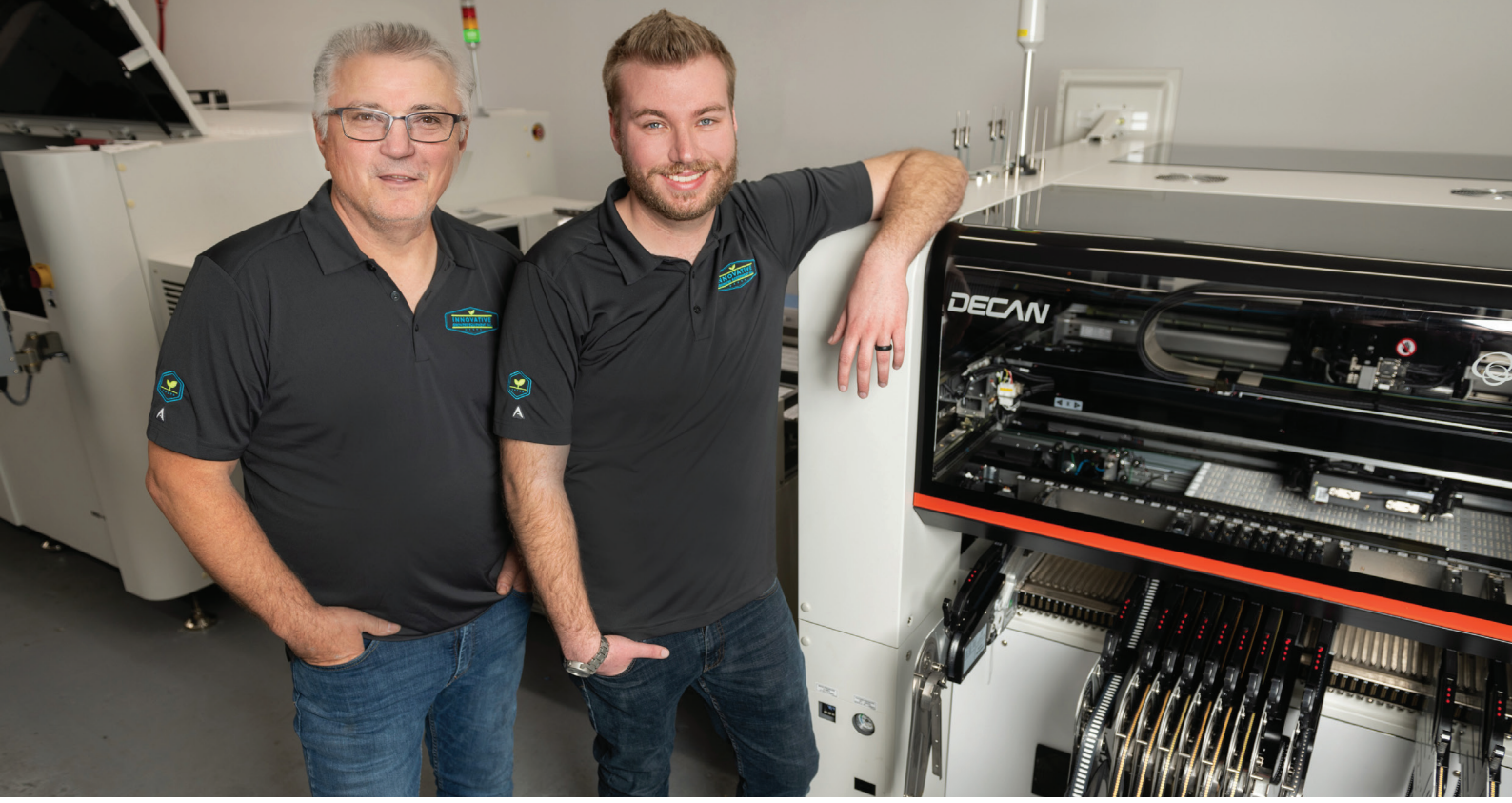
Chris and Bruce started IGE in mid-2016 to meet horticulturists’ needs of rolling benches and racks. “We began as a true grassroots company. My family and friends loaned me their time, tools and advice,” Mayer, IGE and ILE CEO said. In 2017, he hired his first official employee. By the end of that year, the company was up to 30 employees and growing steadily. Chris said that he then used his rolling bench product line to expand vertically into niche markets and, in 2018, he acquired water tank supplies. The next step was adding lights.

Enter Butch Tomasko, a lighting expert with more than 30 years of experience in manufacturing and light building factories. Chris first met Butch when he purchased a line as a contract manufacturer (CM). While the company phased out of CM to focus on horticulture solutions, Chris and Butch maintained their relationship. Butch partnered with Chris and designed lights around IGE’s racks and benches. In 2019, Innovative Lighting Equipment (ILE), a division of IGE, was born.

ILE was a successful addition to IGE from the start. It experienced significant growth in its first two years, especially in the horticultural markets, including hydroponics and cannabis. Tomasko, ILE President, added that cannabis comprises approximately 85 percent of its business with the remaining 15 percent coming from horticulture/

*Butch Tomasko and Chris Mayer founded Innovative Lighting Equipment (ILE), a division of Innovative Growers Equipment (IGE) in 2019 to provide lighting for IGE’s racks and benches.*





*ILE purchased a complete turnkey high-speed line from Hanwha Techwin that has provided fast ROI, reduced cost to build and efficient production plans.*

hydroponics and that legalization of cannabis has increased business, resulting in the need for LED lights. The company is proud that it never has needed to borrow money, and that it is one of only a few companies that grew during the COVID pandemic. By the end of 2021, IGE is on track to earn its highest revenue, with approximately one third of that coming from lights.

To keep up with its horticultural lighting solutions sales, the company needed to expand its line. After much research, Hanwha Techwin Systems was chosen. Butch used his long-time working relationship with Kurt Whitlock of Whitlock & Associates, one of Hanwha Techwin's equipment distributors, to find out how Hanwha Techwin's technology could best help ILE. "Whitlock's commitment to excellence and top-notch servicing of customers is unmatched in the industry," said Tomasko. "We knew that Kurt would help us choose the best-fit technology for our needs and price point." ILE purchased a complete turnkey high-speed line from Hanwha Techwin, consisting of a state-of-the-art dual lane 48" long board loader, screen printer, pick-and-place, IR-oven soldering system, and interface conveyors. Tomasko added that the line has been up and running for a while, and ILE has noticed numerous benefits, and a less than one-year ROI. "With the Hanwha Techwin line, we have been able to significantly reduce our cost to build and control our production plans with a just-in-time mentality. We also have the ability to automate this technology, which is a tribute to Hanwha Techwin's technology and equipment." He added that another benefit of the Hanwha Techwin line is that it allows a platform that accommodates 4' boards, throughout line.

Tomasko said, "Originally, we purchased boards from a company in Seoul, Korea but realized that we could build our own boards for less locally, further boosting the "Made in the USA" mentality. So, we started building our own boards in-house for a significant cost reduction and are the only company to have this big-board capability." Tomasko noted that ILE choose the

Hanwha Techwin line specifically due to its dual lane capability and speed of the LED placement.

'American Manufactured, Assembled and Installed' is IGE's motto and the company accomplishes this within its 300,000 sq. ft. facility in Northern Illinois. It also has a 15,000 sq. ft facility and showroom in Canada. With more than 100 employees, IGE features robotic welding stations for efficient workflow, precision CNC machine centers for automated milling, Hyd-Mech bundle cutting systems, robotic plastic manufacturing, plasma cutting systems, and full shipping/delivery throughout the global market. Recently IGE invested heavily into the automated LED and electronic manufacturing featuring the Hanwha Techwin big-board LED line while simultaneously commissioning two state-of-the-art tube lasers to increase capacity and accuracy of parts production in the factory. The company's commitment and utilization of robotics automation in a majority of the internal processes ensures that IGE can offer its customers state-of-the-art products while keeping costs down.

"With the introduction of ILE, IGE has put one of the final touches on it's made and or assembled in the USA business model. The addition of the Hanwha big board assembly line is another step in the company's commitment to manufacture competitively in the United States," added Tomasko.

Mayer concluded, "We are a small company that goes up against big, multi-billion dollar companies. Our size allows us to be efficient, providing fast time to market. Additionally, because we have smaller inventory, we can adjust and change product lines quickly without waiting for bureaucratic approval. Changeovers are easy. We control our own destiny. By keeping our business in-house, we can weather the storm better than the larger companies and accommodate growth trends such as cannabis and hydroponics within the horticultural market."

[www.innovativegrowersequipment.com](http://www.innovativegrowersequipment.com)

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