

Keeping it in the family: **ELECTROLAB TRAINING SYSTEMS**

Safe to say Wilsons found right formula



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Norm Wilson and his children are in the business of helping save lives in the workplace and at home.

The highly successful SafeStart training program developed by their company, Electrolab Training Systems in the Northeast Industrial Park, a decade ago has now been sold in 40 countries, translated into 25 languages and trained more than one million workers in workplace safety. But the family isn't resting on its laurels.

The 78-year-old Wilson is taking Electrolab on a \$2 million, five-year expansion so that it can take SafeStart into an even larger marketplace.

"The main reason for the expansion is to significantly penetrate the American market because there is such potential there. In fact, the potential of the American market vastly exceeds our capability of catering to it," Wilson said with a smile.

He said the expansion, which includes hiring 25 more people to update, expand and sell SafeStart, will "accelerate our ability to penetrate and become a new player, if not the main player in this field."

From its humble beginnings in 1974 with two employees, Electrolab has grown to employ 51 people and generate \$10 million in annual sales.

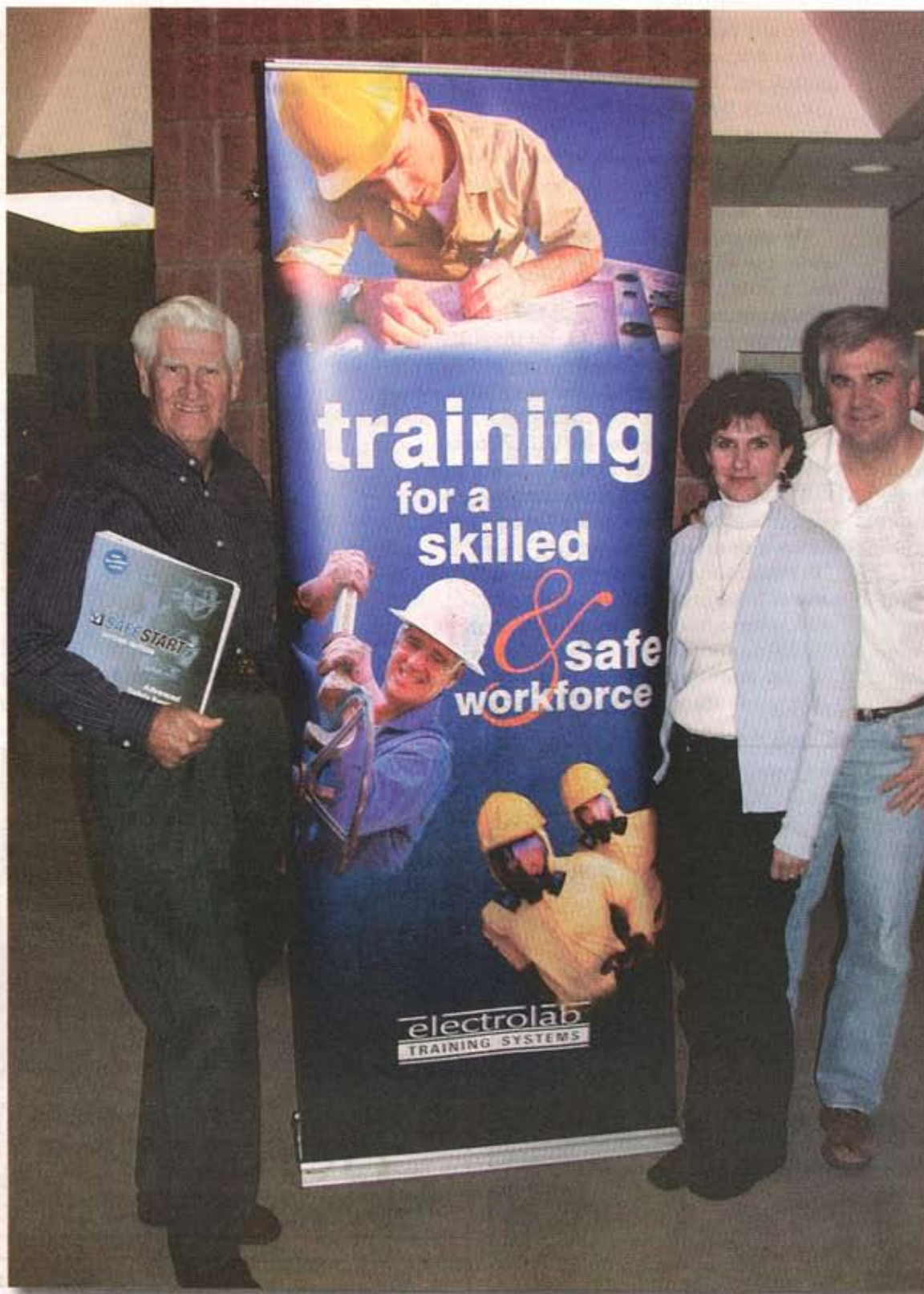
Wilson said he's particularly proud that his three children have played an integral role in moving the company forward these past three decades.

Larry Wilson authored the SafeStart employee training program in 1999 and is company vice-president.

Don Wilson, 48, is vice-president of sales while Barb Tait, 44, is general manager.

The siblings purchased Electrolab in 1994 and have been operating it since.

"I feel very fortunate that I have three children that have



Norm Wilson, founder of Electrolab Training Systems, left, children Barb Tait and Don Wilson (missing is Larry Wilson) are taking the University Avenue company into a \$2 million expansion to market their SafeStart safety training program into the United States.

come into the business with virtually no sibling rivalry between them. All of them respect the competencies of the others," Wilson said.

The company founder and president said he never expected Electrolab to be anywhere as successful as it has been.

"We really started as a manufacturers' representative and distributor and we expected to remain a relatively small company until it just grew," he said.

SafeStart has enabled Electrolab to become a major

player in safety training.

SafeStart is a classroom presentation composed of videotapes, workbooks and classroom discussion covering five different units and taking almost eight hours to complete. The training program identifies universal human factor concepts that contribute to people being injured and teaches critical error reduction techniques.

Wilson said the program has enabled participating companies to reduce their lost-time accident rate

by 30 to 60 per cent.

Barb Tait said working at Electrolab is rewarding.

"We know we're saving lives and helping people develop skills for better careers," she said. "I'm also proud of what we have accomplished locally here by having 50 people employed in good jobs."

Don Wilson said it's great working with his father and siblings.

"It's nice working with people that you have grown up with and that you love and trust," he said. "We're a successful company because our people care and they want to make other people's lives better."

Norm Wilson was a partner in another company, Electronic Controls Ltd. in Belleville, that manufactured everything that went into electrical laboratories in high schools and colleges.

When that business burned to the ground, Wilson started Electrolab Training Systems in the Morch Marine property.

With the cultural shift in the United States to make workplaces safer for employees, Wilson said that opened an entire new market for safety training equipment.

"And we just rode along with it," Wilson said.

Electrolab built its 8,000 square foot facility on University Avenue in 1988 and completed another 2,000 square foot addition in 1995.

Wilson said construction is expected to start this spring on another 2,000 square foot addition. Electrolab continued to sell other companies training resources into the Canadian marketplace, everything from WHMIS and electrical safety to forklift safety and transportation of hazardous goods.

Electrolab's business took off in 1999 when it introduced the SafeStart training program that was written entirely by Larry Wilson and introduced to Canadian companies.

Following the successful launch in Canada, Electrolab took it to the American market in 2003 and, with its \$2 million expansion, hopes to further penetrate that large market.

"Training for a skilled and safe workforce is our passion. We're excited with the prospect of expanding our product lines and programs worldwide," Wilson said.