



SHARPSVILLE AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Newsletter

Author Cindy Cryzter is scheduled to give a talk at the History Society's December meeting. In what is expected to be an interesting presentation, she will discuss the Civil War experiences of her great-great-grandfather, Thomas D. Nelson, of the 100th Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry (the "Roundhead Regiment"). Her talk, as well as the book she wrote, is based on letters her ancestor wrote. While many enjoy learning about the Civil War, the first-hand accounts of camp life, concerns over the family in his native Lawrence County, and the horrors of the battlefield and his ultimate death in the notorious Andersonville Prison, should be of particular interest. We anticipate a good turn-out and please tell any friends who might be interested.

Likewise, our October tour of Riverside Cemetery exceeded expectations, with a turnout of around 80, and with those attending finding the presentations engaging. We would like to do similar events in the future but need your input. One idea the Society has been kicking around is a "ghost tour" since we do have a few ghost stories in town. If this sounds of interest—and especially if you have a ghost story to add—please let us know.

We welcome any other ideas you may have for a tour or for the subject of a talk at one of our meetings.

The same goes for our newsletter articles. While we've had a few outside contributions in the ten-year run of this newsletter, we are always looking for more. If you think a reminiscence of what life was like when you were growing up in Sharpshville isn't worthy of publication, you are mistaken. By all means, not only will it be of interest but it is the type of information, the personal and first-hand, that we want to record. On the other hand, if you have questions—something you want to see covered in a newsletter article, let us know. Finally, if you have information to share but feel it may be incomplete or, by itself, of little interest, don't be so sure. Your half-story may be able to be completed by information in our archives or may be the spark that allows us to tell a larger story.

Upcoming Events

Civil War Talk by Cindy Cryzter

author of *A Civil War Husband:
100th Pennsylvania Roundheads*

at our next meeting Monday

December 5th 7 p.m.



GAMBLING SPREE BUS TRIP

Rivers Casino Pittsburgh, November 16th

Last one of the season!

Call 724-813-9199 for info and reservations

Open House

As a reminder the Historical Society is open the first and third Saturday of the month from 1:00p.m. to 3:00 p.m.

Come see the unique architecture of our historic building and a large display of our artifacts, documents, and photos of Sharpshville history.

Our basement display is expanding and may include items you may have missed on a prior visit.

Contact Us

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see our website for officers' phone numbers

Headquarters: 131 N. Mercer Ave., Sharpshville, Pa.

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Meetings are held the First Monday of the Month at 7:00pm at our headquarters

A Look Back

Cattron Group, Inc.

Industry in Sharpsville has largely been the production of the most basic materials—iron, not even alloyed as steel, and its castings. Yet, for over half a century, Sharpsville was home to a true high-tech business: Cattron Group, Inc.

The firm got its start in December 19, 1946, when Jim Cattron was authorized as the first Motorola Service Station. The model of direct sales by a rep of the telecommunications giant with local service by an independent contractor benefited both parties, as well as the customer for decades. From Motorola's standpoint, bringing in a trusted local businessman who would do the service often sealed the deal; affiliation with a national firm known for quality would work to the mutual advantage of the Service Station. Yet, these were only a little more than handshake deals. Jim recalled his initial appointment consisted of "just a mimeographed page," replaced within "maybe a year or two by a certificate." Prior to that he had worked for Motorola, which had pioneered the development of car radios and had invented the first hand-held walkie-talkie in 1940. As an independent Service Station, Jim installed and serviced two-way radios for police and fire vehicles, contractors, and trucking companies—with his first customer Anderson Taxi of Sharon, Pa. One of the reasons for the Motorola appointment was that Jim held an FCC license, something in short-supply, since use of 2-way radios was restricted during World War II. Operating under the name Cattron Radio Communications Service, the scope of business also included sales and service of walkie-talkies, used by first responders and in industrial plants. As Motorola expanded their product line to include closed circuit television, pagers, and access control systems, so did Cattron.

For Jim this work was not just a job; he took a keen interest and enjoyment in radio technology. In 1957, Jim used his own radio receiver to track the orbit of the Soviet satellite Sputnik after the U.S. government announced that the satellite must have burned up because it was no longer transmitting. In fact, it had only stopped transmitting on one of its two frequencies. The US government, which had earlier claimed that Cattron's information was false, later recanted and admitted that Sputnik was still in orbit.

Jim originally operated out of a panel truck, but in 1956, he moved the business to the basement of his home. In 1970, a headquarters building for the company was purchased at 29 N. Second Street. (On a block that years ago was largely taken up by the Robinson Brothers' woodworking establishment, the building had housed an automobile repair garage, which August Angel purchased around 1946. He moved his print shop there—where among other jobs he printed a revival of *The Sharpsville Advertiser* newspaper. Later he moved his family to the apartment upstairs. Angel would serve on Borough Council and also ran the popular dance- and reception-hall next door, Angel's Casino. Around 1964, Angel sold the 29 N. Second building and business to a Jack L. Hernley. On December 28, 1967, the new owner had the misfortune of a raid by State Police where they confiscated a large quantity of football and basketball pool slips he printed. After Jim Cattron purchased the building, and during its remodeling, relics of the building's unsavory past were found—plates for printing counterfeit currency.)

The business would be completely transformed by a new product line and a lucky break. Motorola introduced radio-signaled remote controls in 1965. These allowed industrial equipment, such as overhead cranes, to be operated remotely. As an authorized dealer, Cattron's company installed and serviced them along with Motorola's other product lines. Around 1968, with a background in industrial electronics and in servicing the Motorola remote controls, Carl Verholek came on board.

In 1972, Motorola decided to abandon the remote-control product line. Not only did they view their customer base for the controls as too far-flung to be worth the investment, at the time corporate doctrine was that a division had to meet a three-year average revenue of \$2,000,000, or they would be axed. As a result, in 1976, they approached Cattron and agreed to sell the business for \$40,000. After the deal was signed, and to the surprise of Cattron and Verholek, truckloads from Motorola containing around \$10,000,000 of inventory, spare parts and manufacturing equipment showed up in Sharpsville. Since they were no longer in this segment of the business, the items were of no particular value to Motorola. They were, however, keenly interested in Cattron's ability to service the Motorola products still in the field, in order to protect the reputation of the Motorola brand (especially, since many of the remote-control customers remained current customers for Motorola's core product lines). This new venture was known as Cattron, Inc.

J. L. BAKER
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BAKER & JOHNSTON...

BOTH
'PHONES...

Livery and Feed Stables



Good Single and Double Rigs at Lowest Rates. Carriages for
Parties, Weddings and Funerals.

MAIN ST., near WALNUT, ... SHARPSVILLE, PA.

This business card, recently donated by Leo Scott, is from the Baker & Johnston Livery and Feed Stables. It is a reminder of the time before the prevalence of the automobile, but also not all families owned a horse and carriage. Most stores were in walking distances and streetcars ran to Sharon for a commute to work or for whatever specialty might be needed there. So, a horse and carriage could indeed be something hired for a special event. A 1905 map indeed shows livery stables on Main Street between what was recently Palo Floral and the church behind. The card's mention of "Both 'Phones" is from a time when "Telephone" was a fairly new term and the abbreviation of 'Phone was even newer. "Both" refers to the time when there were two competing telephone exchanges—the Union Telephone and the Central District—well before AT&T (a successor to the Central District) had what was considered a "natural monopoly" over landlines. This helps us date the card to the 1905-1910 era.

With Gratitude

We received a generous donation from

Marguerite Kautzman

We also received a substantial donation
from

Rod Alexander

That will be used to fund removal of two
large trees whose limbs and potential fall
threaten the Historical Society's building.

Another significant donation was received
from

Emmee Supplee Hanna

Collections update

Jim Burns donated twelve photographs of storefronts in
downtown Sharpsville before Urban Renewal.

Skip Hittle donated three photographs from 1910s-1920s

Leo Scott donated the business card above.

Ed Getway donated a photograph of railroad workers in front of
a Pennsylvania R.R. locomotive and coal-car, near
Sharpsville.

Peggie Reinke donated two scrapbooks, one from the 1930s,
and one from the 40s, kept by her mother and grandmother.

Ruthann Black donated an architectural drawing by Milton S.
Osborne of a proposed renovation to the storefront of the
Bloch Brothers Clothing Store.

Robert Verholek donated a commemorative plate from the First
Presbyterian Church.

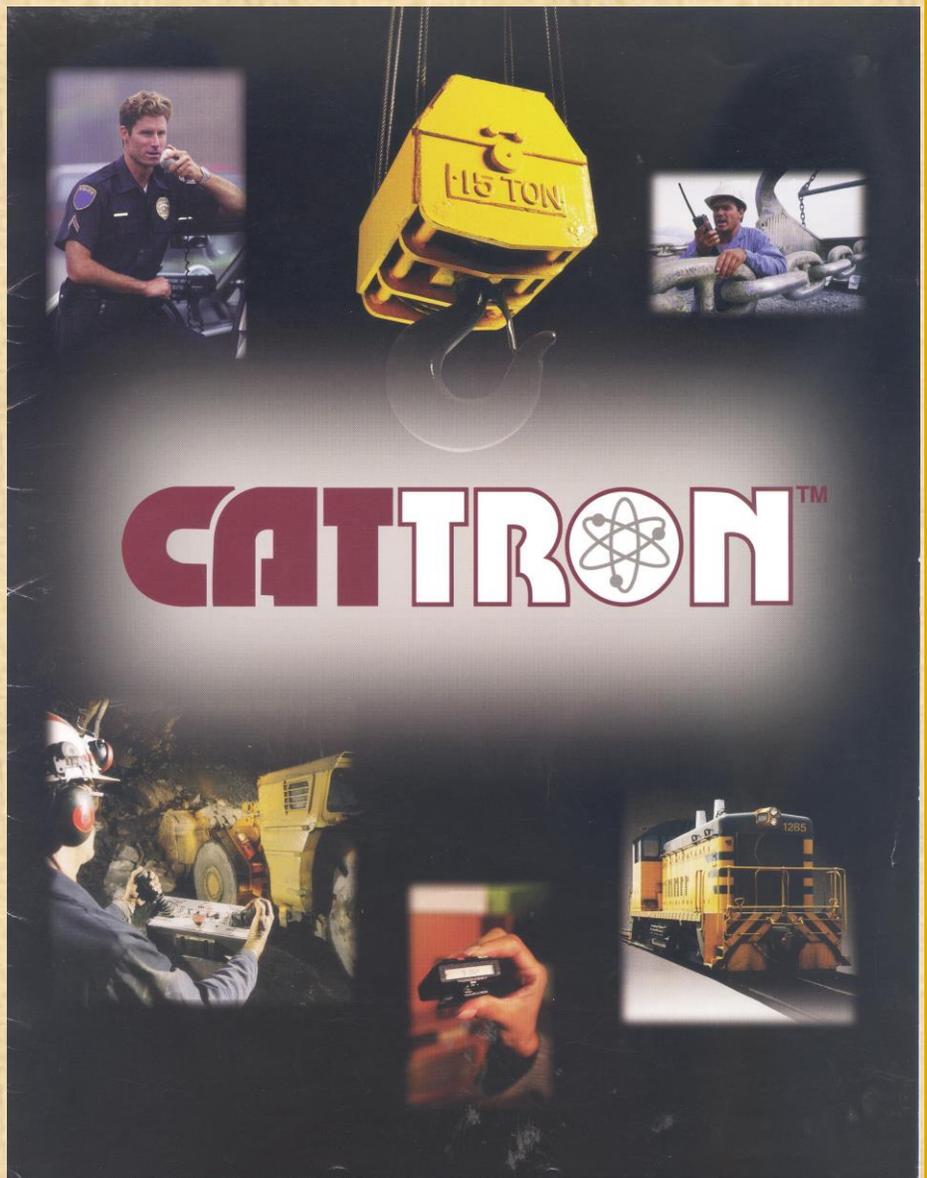
Cattron Group, Inc., cont'd.

At the beginning of 1977, Jim Robertson was brought on board as the company's twelfth hire. With both a technical and sales background, Jim had risen through the ranks of Motorola, becoming a regional manager. In late 1976, Cattron had approached him for advice on hiring someone from Motorola to help with their newly-acquired remote-control business. Since the advancement in Motorola had already required a couple relocations, Jim weighed his options and asked to be considered for the position. While Motorola usually frowned on a Service Station hiring one of other their employees, a deal was worked out and Robertson was hired to head up this new undertaking.

Cattron's continued to improve upon the remote-control product, developing a fifth-generation product by 2003. The initial application of their radio-signaled remote-controls was for electrical overhead travelling cranes, the overhead cranes common in area steel mills as well as other manufacturing plants. Armco Steel and Lockheed were important early customers that kept them in business during the early years. Going through his old Motorola customer list, Jim Robertson heard time and again, "wish you had called a year ago, we had to switch to a competitor after Motorola left the market." Though Alcoa would ultimately be won back as a customer, one call to an Alcoa plant in Tennessee was met with this same response. They had already switched but did still have a dozen Motorola units (worth \$6,000 each) that were headed to the trash. Cattron was able to pick them up and re-sell them and satisfy a new customer who needed these same units. Controls were also used for yard locomotives, that is privately-owned locomotives used in the railyards of manufacturing plants; the first use was on a cement plant locomotive in Dixon, Illinois in 1977. Other core applications were used for all manner of material handling, hard-rock mining equipment, shiploaders, mobile equipment, and agricultural machinery. Some of the more unusual remote-control applications were a minesweeper for the military, on ski-lifts, and at Disney World. For the Toronto production of *Phantom of the Opera*, the show's producers set up a remote-control boat for one of the scenes. They didn't realize its radio signal crossed with those used by the security detail of the Canadian Prime Minister who was in the audience. As a result, the boat headed straight toward the VIP seats. The next day, Cattron received a call to supply a more reliable system.

The value-added of remote controls was two-fold: Safety was increased by removing a worker from a dangerous environment when control of machinery could now be done remotely. Even in normal environments, moreover, remote-controls put the person who controlled the moving object (like an overhead crane or a locomotive) closer to the action and thus avoided problems with line-of-sight or miscommunication between two employees. Secondly, efficiency was increased—if the worker on the ground was controlling the crane, a craneman in

Cont'd. on page 5



Cover of Cattron sales brochure from 1996

Cattron Group, Inc., cont'd.

the overhead cranebox was no longer needed. The second aspect was not lost on plant labor, especially when Cattron's customers would hand out termination notices the day after Cattron installed remote-controls. In some instances, security would be required for the Cattron employees who were doing installations.

Cattron's building at 29 N. Second Street in Sharpsville was of modest size, about 4,200 square feet, with a later 1,350 square foot addition. Assembly of the remote-control units took place in the garage area in the back, with Carl Verholek and Jim Robertson doing the work at a small bench. As a fledgling operation that was dealing with Fortune 500 companies, they feared that a rep from one of these customers would stop by and be less-than-impressed by their humble facilities. Nonetheless, with business improving in both their Cattron Communications and Cattron, Inc. segments, they were able to expand locally. While offices in Youngstown and Warren date back to the 1970s, in 1980 they built a facility in Warren, Ohio, as well as continued to operate a location in Boardman, Ohio. The following year, they purchased the building at 140 W. Shenango Street in Sharpsville. The remote-control assembly would be done here initially, but it would ultimately become the corporate offices. Space was then leased from Campagna Construction to Cattron, Inc. at 58 W. Shenango Street for in what had been the old Warner & Smith trucking terminal. The area leased would increase over time until, eventually, the building was purchased in 1985. It had almost 9,000 square-feet for assembly and warehousing, as well as sufficient office space. Still the business continued to grow, and a two-story 8,200 square-foot addition was completed in 1995. Purchase of the buildings at 103 W. Shenango Street (since torn down) and at 25-27 W. Shenango, for overflow storage was made in 1995. This completed the expansion of the physical facilities in Sharpsville.

Meanwhile, the firm still continued the sales, installation and service of the Motorola two-way radios, pagers, closed-circuit television, and access control devices. In 1986, sales and leasing would be split between the division Cattron Electronics, with a subsidiary, Cattron Communications, Inc. responsible for service and installation. Another division, Tower Company, was formed in 1976. It owned or leased communications towers which serviced what were then private two-way radio or cellular networks. By 1996, five towers were owned with Tower Company transmitting antennas on another twelve. The 1999 acquisition of NUCOM Electronics of New Castle, Pa. allowed Cattron Communications to expand its customer base. That year, the Tower Company division was renamed Cattron Network Services which would also facilitate the company's new network trunking system. This was followed in 2000 by Cattron Communications' purchase of a building in Boardman, Ohio.

Nonetheless, the more significant growth was in the remote-control segment. From 1988 to 1993 average annual growth was 15%, with Cattron becoming the second largest producer of cordless remote-control systems in North America. Cattron had also by this time set its sights on the international market. In 1991, Cattron purchased a Canadian firm, and renamed it Cattron Controls, Ltd. This allowed entry to the Canadian market with Cattron Controls selling and servicing the remote-control products manufactured in Sharpsville. Two year later, a British firm, Telemotive (UK), Ltd. was purchased. This overseas acquisition presented challenges for a small-town company. Not only was it Cattron's initial foray into dealings between two countries "divided by a common language," final negotiations revealed a \$400,000 error in Cattron's favor. The London attorneys for the multi-national that owned Telemotive thought they could bully their way past this sticking point, but finally budged at the eleventh hour. The purchase included Telemotive's line of remote-control products which utilized the infrared spectrum—useful in some specialized applications—but their existing customer base gave Cattron access to European and Commonwealth markets. The sale of Telemotive had been a spin-off by the British conglomerate Trafalgar House who had inherited the company from another acquisition and which was well outside their business focus. As a result, little heed had been paid to the operations or the fact that a Telemotive rep had established an office in South Africa, mainly because he liked to vacation there. This incidental presence was discovered only after Cattron's purchase of Telemotive. Since the South African mining industry offered a significant opportunity for sale Cattron's remote-controls, a subsidiary in that country was established in 1997 to service that market.

In October 1993, some internal corporate rearrangements were made. The holding company, Lease Comm., Inc., formed in 1986, was renamed Cattron Group, Inc. A subsidiary, Cattron International, Ltd., was also created to implement and manage further international expansion. Ownership of the Canadian subsidiary, Cattron Controls, Ltd.

Immigration to Sharpsville, cont'd.

Cattron Controls, Ltd. was transferred from Cattron, Inc. to the holding company.

In 1996, Cattron Group received ISO 9001 certification. This internationally recognized standard for quality management is often a requirement when dealing with large manufacturers. An ISO 9002 certification was achieved the following year.

The year 1996, also marked Cattron's 50th anniversary, with a three-day celebration and open-house held on Shenango Street that was attended by Bob Galvin, Motorola chairman (and son of the company founder), as well as other Motorola executives and representatives of many of Cattron's customers and suppliers. Interviewed at the time, Jim Cattron attributed the company's success to his being "extremely fortunate to have tremendously wonderful and knowledgeable people who worked with me over the years—not worked for me but with me." In an interview with a Motorola company historian, Jim was even more forceful in expressing his philosophy:

For MSS [Motorola Service Station] Jim Cattron, the concept of being a boss is unappealing, not because it connotes responsibility, but because it suggests a hierarchy that Cattron believes inhibits teamwork.

"There are certain words that bother me very much one is 'boss,' " says Cattron, "Anytime I hear any one our people referring to me or one of the other people as 'boss,' they're in trouble right then and there. We don't have bosses, we don't have time for bosses; a boss has to tell another person what to do. The people we have know what to do. . . . I tell every person that we hire that they can never work for us. Plain and simple, they cannot work for us, they have to work *with* us. Big difference."

Reflecting back, Carl Verholek noted the company's very low employee turnover and its reputation as a good place to work. Year-end bonuses were distributed to employees first, before the owners took any. He gave special mention to Jim Robertson, chief engineer Bob Aiken, Mike Pearson for finance, and Sue Turco for administration. Mentioned as well, the long-used logo with electron orbits within the "O" of Cattron was designed by Verholek and reinforced outsiders' conception that an old Sharpsville surname was instead linked with electrons and technology.

In 1998 Cattron Group attained a milestone of 150 employees. That same year, sales for Cattron Electronics and Cattron Communications reached \$4.7 million and North American remote-control sales were nearly \$8 million.

Overseas expansion continued, led by Jim Robertson. A Brazilian subsidiary was set up in 1998, Cattron Americas, Ltda., at the request of an important customer ALCOA. As an example of the vagaries of the international marketplace that are often confronted, when ALCOA needed maintenance for control equipment and shipped it to Sharpsville for repair, Brazil would impose both an export duty and then a reimporting duty. A facility in-country would avoid these double-duties on an item, for which a tariff had already been paid when first installed. Sales and maintenance throughout South America were conducted by this subsidiary.

October 2000, saw the biggest acquisition yet, the German firm Theimeg, GmbH. Theimeg was Cattron's largest European competitor, and the leading provider of remote controls for rail applications in Europe. The purchase doubled the size of Cattron's remote control unit and made the merged entities the world's largest manufacturer of portable remote-control systems. The significance of the acquisition was marked by a name change for the companies now known as Cattron-Theimeg, Inc. and Cattron-Theimeg International, Inc., with the names of the Canadian, South African, and South American subsidiaries likewise changed.

Yet, one major market segment remained out of reach until February 2001: moving railroad locomotives by remote control. While Cattron's product had been in use on privately-owned yard locomotives since 1977, the company began eyeing their use on mainline railroads. Federal regulators and railroad unions, though, had blocked their use until February 2001. Theimeg had a presence in the European market, but their product was not readily adaptable in the U.S. European trains were passenger-oriented, with fewer cars and lower tonnage per car compared to the U.S. Cattron's first U.S. order came in from Norfolk-Southern—25 units at \$125,000 each—the largest purchase order they had ever received. Soon afterward, the railroad's CEO, seeing the product's obvious cost and safety advantages, found out about the order. He asked why such a small purchase, and ordered another 100 units. At the time, Cattron was still beta-testing the product (including on a locomotive they purchased that sat on unused track in Sharpsville). About a dozen employees and a massive amount of overtime were required to fulfill the order. This new market, which was seen at the time as "the biggest plum out there right now," led to a further round of explosive growth, but was not

Cattron Group, Inc., cont'd.

without a new headache. CANAC Remote Control Technologies, Inc., a subsidiary of Canadian National Railway and which had originally developed remote-control products for locomotives, sued Cattron-Theimeg for patent infringement in February 2002, with Cattron counter-suing in response. While railroad customers did not abandon the Cattron product, the patent litigation did result in a hold on new orders. The matter was resolved, however, not in court, but by Cattron-Theimeg's 2004 purchase from Canadian Nation of its CANAC subsidiary and its Beltpack product line. Ownership of the CANAC facility in an industrial park outside of Pittsburgh was included in the purchase. (In an unrelated deal, shortly thereafter Remtron, Inc., a California-based maker of industrial remote-controls, was purchased.) This resolution of the CANAC matter gave Cattron-Theimeg a near-monopoly in the North American rail market. With the end of the patent dispute, rail customers were happy they could continue using a product they liked, but were a little disturbed that they would be left with no alternative to Cattron-Theimeg; some asked General Electric, the major manufacturer of locomotives, to look into developing a competing remote-control product.

In May 2003, Jim Cattron and the other shareholders sold to Weatherly, LLC. At the time, it was estimated that Cattron's had 100,000 installed systems serving more than 10,000 customers. Weatherly's purchase was in partnership with Taglich Brothers, a private equity investor focusing on small-cap firms. The purchase of Cattron-Theimeg, however, was the first where Taglich sought an active role in management; previously they were passive investors. (A decade later they were still quite proud of the success of the acquisition.) The name was retained and operations continued in Sharpsville much as before, with, however, one exception. This original business—sales, installation, and service of Motorola two-way radios—remained steady, but compared to the tremendous growth of Cattron-Theimeg's remote-control business, it became an increasingly small part in the overall scheme of things. In December 2003, a decision was made to sell the unit to Staley Communications of Wheeling, West Virginia. Staley had a similar operation and was able to use the Cattron acquisition to expand to a 30-county market. The 29 N. Second Street location, with its employees, was kept open until 2014.

Other changes following the purchase by Weatherly included the acquisition in April 2005 of SIAMtec, a Canadian manufacturer of remote control products for the mining industry. This was followed the next month by the naming of John F. Paul as CEO. In October 2006, the name of the holding company, Cattron Group, Inc. was changed to World Wide Wireless Holdings, Inc.

China was the final major foreign market for Cattron. By 2003, they had made initial inquiries and were matched with a Chinese distributor by a trusted Singaporean rep. Progress was slow, and after three years, Cattron noticed sales were much less than expected. It was at this point—and perhaps indicative of the opacity of Chinese legal and business dealings—that they realized the Chinese distributor had registered all of Cattron's intellectual property in his name. Legal proceedings to reclaim the IP took about two years, and since 2008, orders began to build in China.

Jim Cattron died February 2, 2010. Jim was remembered not only for his business accomplishments but for his community service—30 years on the Sharpsville Area School Board, director of the Sharon Regional Health System and of what was then called the Crippled Children's School, president of the Sharon Country Club, active in the First United Methodist Church of Sharpsville, and a 60-year member of the Sharpsville Service Club. He was a Buhl Day honoree and received the Distinguished Citizen Award from the French Creek Boy Scout Council. Jim's wife of 63 years, Phyllis, who he always considered a partner both in business success as well as life, died the following month.

In late 2010, Laird Technologies, a Missouri-based unit of the British conglomerate, Laird, plc, bought the company in 2010 for \$90 million. At the time, Cattron's revenues were \$58.8 million. The acquisition seemed to make sense on paper: Cattron had a leading position in the rail, mining, and industrial markets it served. Laird was a worldwide company with 10,000 workers in 39 facilities across 13 countries and a leader in wireless connectivity.

While the decision was made in December 2013, Laird made no announcement until April 2014, that they were moving from Sharpsville to facilities in Warren, Ohio. Borough officials made efforts to keep the operation in Sharpsville, and a second option to build a new, larger facility in Hermitage was sweetened by the offer of a \$2.5 million grant from the state; still, Laird opted for the Ohio location. And so ended the 65-year presence of a company Jim Cattron first operated out of a panel truck in Sharpsville.