

GARDNER, ND | SWEN Products Owners Kim and Robert Schobinger hosted David Le, Assistant Regional Director of the United States Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) in their manufacturing facility in Gardner, North Dakota this March.

SWEN Products holds five patents with the USPTO, their most recent design was on their powder-coated, lawn game scoreboards. Amongst the concerns raised, the owners reported cheap imitations from third-party sellers using their website images and then selling customers inferior, smaller products. This listening session provided the USPTO insight into common challenges that small business owners face. These conversations offer insight into how the USPTO can work with US Customs and Border Protection to better protect intellectual property rights against third-party sellers and their counterfeit shipments.

SWEN Products is a second-generation family business. It was started in 1998 by Gene and Kathie Schobinger who began creating weathervanes in rural North Dakota.

"We didn't make the first weathervane, but we did perfect it," the couple laughed.

Since its start, the North Dakota company has more than 8,600 products from weathervanes, wind spinners, and wall plates, to drink stands, collegiate items, and more. They've exported to 27 countries and counting.

"We pride ourselves on our hand-made unique products. Our metalwork is made with quality and craftsmanship in mind," said Robert.

While in North Dakota, Le traveled with members of the NDWBC team, meeting other ecosystem partners and business owners. Le's trip included presentations that helped business owners learn how to protect their intellectual property with the USPTO. He also heard stories from business owners and fielded questions at the Research and Technology Park, NDSU Foundation, University of Jamestown, and the Pride of Dakota Conference on March 22.

NDWBC is grateful for the opportunity to foster meaningful conversations and valuable connections between business owners and ecosystem partners. A special thanks to all who engaged in the conversation and generously shared their experiences.

Shout out to our friends at SWEN Products, the Start-Up Brew community, Interoffice, the Railyard, 701 eateries, Jan Sobolik, Dave Sauvageau, and Adam Elznic at the Research and Technology Park, Zane Gernhart at the NDSU Research Foundation, Katherine Roth at the University of Jamestown, and Katie Huizenga at Pride of Dakota for welcoming Le and leaning into the conversation. Your participation is appreciated and contributes to the growth and success of business owners in our state and beyond.

To learn more about the USPTO and the services they offer to business owners, you can join us at the Women's Business Summit on May 1-3 to meet with Director Molly Kocalski of the Rocky Mountain Regional United States Patent and Trademark Office. Her working session will help business owners gain a comprehensive understanding of trademarks, trade secrets, copyrights, patents, and more.

Want more? NDWBC's free business coaching program is designed to support entrepreneurs and business owners, providing valuable insights, including patent and trademark information, to help you navigate the business landscape successfully.

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NDWBC is a 501(c)(3) non-profit, dedicated to amplifying the economic voice of women business owners and providing them with valuable resources and connections.