



# NATURAL RESOURCES RESEARCH INSTITUTE

# NRRI *Now*

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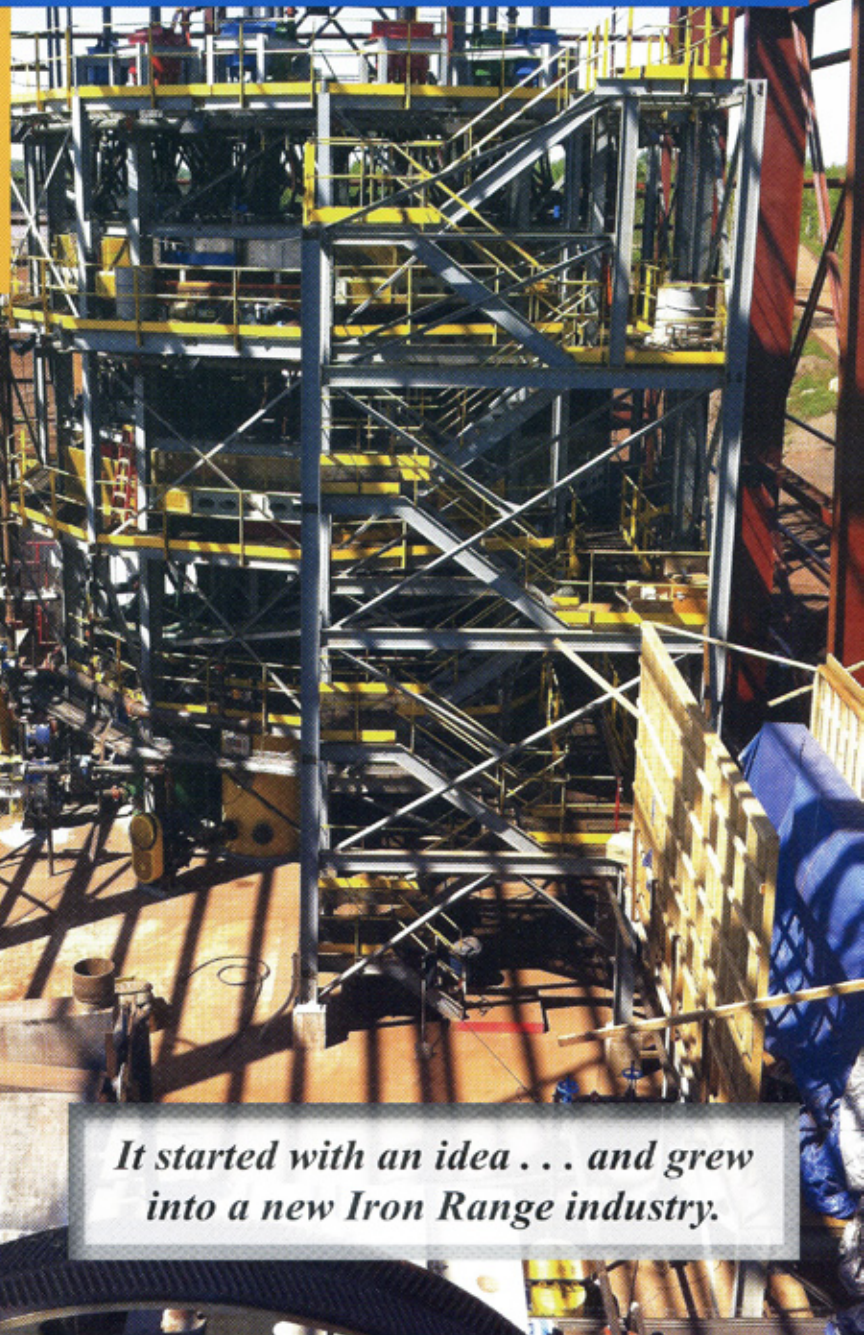
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*It started with an idea . . . and grew into a new Iron Range industry.*

~ Growing Strong Industries

~ Developing New Ideas

~ Nurturing Natural Resources

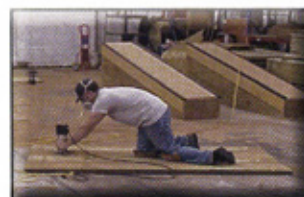
# Nuturing Success

Duluth businesses thrive with NRRI research



**1997** - Greg Benson, Dave Benson and Tony Ciardelli launch TrueRide, in Hamel, Minn., to design and build custom municipal skate parks. They opened with a 1,200 sq. ft. shop and soon expanded to 2,400 sq. ft.

**1999** - The men move their business to Duluth, to a 6,000 sq. ft. facility on Bergquist Road. They expand each year to 25,000 sq. ft. before moving again.



**2000** - UMD's Center for Economic Development introduces the entrepreneurs to NRRI and a long-term relationship ensues. **NRRI** conducts time studies to compare cutting ramp parts by hand vs. using CNC cutting technology. True Ride invests in CNC machines.

**2001** - True Ride starts to incorporate high performance plastic components into their ramp design for a more professional, durable product.



**2001 - NRRI** conducts performance testing of True Ride skate park products and cooperates on product development testing of a new cutting board product manufactured from Richlite, the waste pieces of skating surface.

**2003 - NRRI** conducts the first of several lean manufacturing training and continuous improvement projects. The first project team, "Streamliners," improv logistics on the True Ride manufacturing floor by 30% and reduce floor space requirements by 50%.



**2003** - Epicurean Cutting Surfaces is launched using Richlite. The material is Forest Stewardship Council certified paper and also recycled paper. **NRRI** conducts ultraviolet light and freeze/thaw testing on the product.

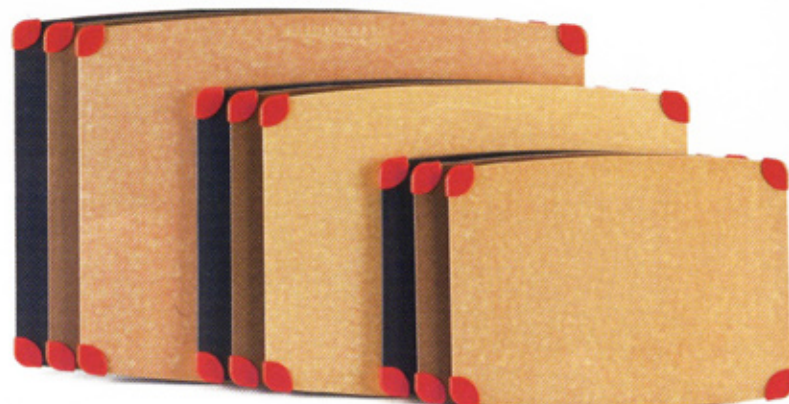
**2004 - NRRI** conducts extensive performance testing to the skate ramp materials, simulating exposure to weather extremes found around the world. This establishes a baseline for evaluating new materials in the future.



**2004** - Distribution of Epicurean boards in Duluth and Minneapolis begins. The company sells a few hundred the first year. (By 2011 they're selling well over a million annually.)

**2005** - The men form Hawks Boots, LLC to purchase a building to house True Ride and the new and rapidly expanding businesses. The site was a contaminated brownfield that the company restored, and redesigned with the help of renowned architect David Salmela.

EPICUREAN®



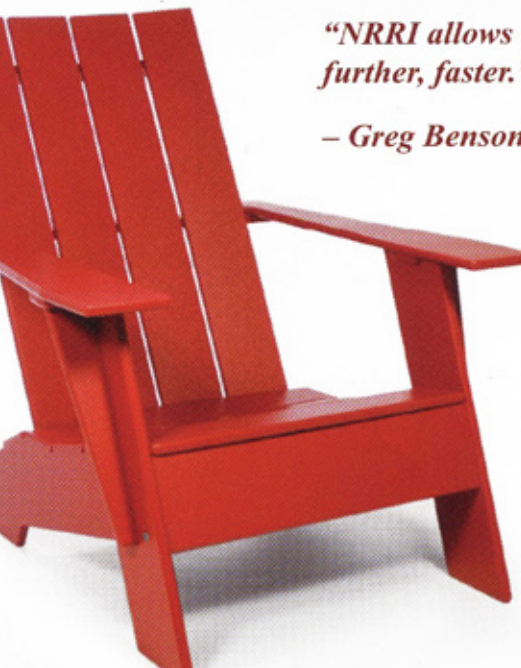
**2005** - In an effort to use their material to its fullest, parts for Adirondack styled chairs are nested into the CNC router files with skate park components. The tough skate park material is structural, durable and maintenance free, making ideal outdoor furniture.

**2006** - Loll's Adirondack collection is launched online on Thanksgiving Day. The modern design and durable, recycled material was an immediate hit. The company sold a few hundred chairs the first year. (By 2011, they sell more than 10,000 products annually.)



**2007** - After building over 450 custom designed skate parks all over the country, TrueRide is sold to skate park competitor Spohn Ranch in California.

**2007 - NRRI** is an ongoing cooperator, helping to implement new production processes for Loll and Epicurean to meet increasing orders. Performance testing continues to help Loll select high performance materials and Epicurean to assess accelerated aging of their cutting board products.



*"NRRI allows us to do more and progress further, faster."*

*- Greg Benson, President/CEO, Loll*



**2009** - Epicurean boards are sold in over 5,000 retail stores throughout the U.S. and Canada and in over 50 countries throughout Europe, Asia, Australia, and North America.

**2010** - The Hawks Boots building is bursting at the seams. Both Epicurean and Loll have had double digit growth right through the current recession. The search for a separate facility for Loll Designs begins.

**2010** - A third business, Intectural, is formed to focus on distribution of innovative architectural materials which have a commitment to conservation and sustainability.

**2011** - Loll production moves to an old Michelina's facility formerly owned by Duluth businessman Jenno Palluci, now owned by Weston Wier.

**2011** - Epicurean, Loll and Intectural continue to build on their 11-year relationship with **NRRI** to support their sustainable growth by helping them create and implement efficient manufacturing practices and develop high performance products.



*"NRRI's lean training really helped us with manufacturing efficiency as a first thought, not an afterthought."*

*- Tony Ciardelli, President/CEO,*