

GARAGA ACQUIRES NORTH CENTRAL DOOR

By Vicki Jones, Editor

In September, Garaga announced that it had acquired North Central Door of Bemidji, Minn. It is Garaga's second acquisition of a U.S. garage door manufacturer since the company's inception.

Some background

Michel Gendreau founded Garaga in 1983 at the age of 26, when he acquired the assets of Garaga Door Ltd., an established door manufacturer located in Saint-Georges, Quebec.

In that first year, Garaga employed four people and produced one type of product — a lightly insulated aluminum door in six colors. Since then, Garaga has not only expanded in size but has also increased its market presence, especially within the past five years.

2018 — A big year

In the spring of 2018, after serving as Garaga's president for 35 years, Michel passed the reins

to his identical twin sons, Martin and Maxime. Michel continues to serve as executive chairman of the company.

The Gendreau twins were essentially born into the garage door industry and had gained significant experience working in all departments of Garaga for over 20 years. When they accepted their new co-president positions at the age of 34, they were prepared to further

advance their father's vision for Garaga and continue to help grow the company.

In August 2018, Garaga announced that it had acquired Mid-America Door of Ponca City, Okla. The transaction marked the first-ever acquisition of a U.S. garage door manufacturer by a Canadian door firm and helped establish Garaga's presence in the United States.

Even bigger footprint

With the recent acquisition of North Central Door, Garaga now has four manufacturing facilities — two in Canada and two in the U.S. (Minnesota and Oklahoma) with a combined half a million square feet of floor space and over 1,000 employees.

Co-President Maxime Gendreau said, "The North Central Door acquisition will allow Garaga to increase its market share in the United States, and more importantly, this alliance will allow us to increase our distribution network to have a national presence."

North Central Door's established presence in the North Central region of the U.S., its geographic location, and its existing dealer network were important to Garaga's leadership.





An overview of Garaga Corporation's four facilities as of December 2022.

Dealer-focused philosophy

"What makes Garaga successful is our focus and commitment to our dealer network. If our dealers are successful, we will be successful," said Maxime. "We are motivated by growth, and we are working in a spirit of continuity in the development of the American market."

This approach seems to be paying off for Garaga. The company received the prestigious "Industry of the Year" award last spring from the Chamber of Commerce in Ponca City, Okla., in recognition of improvements made since Garaga acquired Mid-America Door in 2018.

An excellent fit

Garaga was looking for more opportunities to expand in the United States. "It became an ideal strategic opportunity for Garaga when the North Central Door President, Steve Palmer, informed my father that their strategic plan included an ownership transition," Maxime said.

After several discussions between Steve, Michel, Martin, and Maxime, the group concluded that the two organizations would be an excellent fit. "We share complementary product lines and similar corporate values, so the decision

to acquire North Central Door was a relatively quick process," added Maxime.

Both Garaga and North Central Door have been operating in their respective countries for 40+ years and both manufacture residential and commercial garage doors. Garaga specializes in polyurethane-insulated garage doors and North Central Door is a manufacturer of polystyrene-insulated garage doors.



Maxime Gendreau, Steve Palmer, Michel Gendreau, and Martin Gendreau

Shared values

While the complementary product lines and dealer networks were important, it was the shared corporate values that made the acquisition ideal. "Garaga is a family-owned company. Our goal is to build a long-lasting organization that is human-focused and that keeps its employees, dealers, and local communities close to heart. North Central Door shares this vision," said Maxime.

Palmer agreed and said that "Garaga and North Central Door share the same core values such as safety, continuous improvement, accountability, and teamwork; making Garaga the partner of choice for our continued growth."

Business as usual

Continuity is essential to the Garaga team. Following the acquisition, Palmer will continue serving as president of North Central Door, all 125 North Central Door employees will keep their jobs, and each distribution channel will remain autonomous.

For now, existing product offerings for both organizations will remain the same. However, Maxime told Door + Access Systems that there may be opportunities for new or additional product offerings in the future.

The polyurethane and full-view lines and niche products that Garaga offers complement North Central Door's products. "At one point, it may be valuable for North Central Door to distribute polyurethane products manufactured by Garaga," he said.

"For now, it is important that each distribution channel stays autonomous, meaning that they continue to do what is best for their network."

Learning from the past

The success of the Mid-America Door acquisition serves as an outstanding blueprint for the Garaga/North Central Door transition. "We learned a lot when Mid-America Door became part of the Garaga family," said Maxime. "Three

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key areas made the acquisition successful: We invested in our employees. We listened to our dealers. We invested in technology.

"At Garaga, we strongly believe that we need to plan for success and that we should not leave anything to chance. We are in this for the long run. We like to go fast, but we are not in a hurry," Maxime said. "We remind ourselves that 'slow is smooth, and smooth is fast!'"

Advancing technology

Garaga's goal is to give their dealers the best of both worlds — quality products that make them stand out in their marketplaces along with reliable service. "But we know that is not enough," Maxime said. "We believe that offering our dealers a complete business model solution, including technology and software designed to make their lives easier, is also crucial to their success."

Garaga has consistently been at the forefront of technology and innovation in the door industry. In 1996, they were among the



first garage door manufacturers to launch a fully functional website.

Since then, the company has remained committed to offering its dealers advanced online resources and tools to help them succeed, such as the company's advanced extranet, GaragaNet, featuring online quoting and ordering, e-training videos for dealers' new employees, real-time SMS messages about incoming deliveries, and more. "In 2022, there were more than 20 continuous improvement features implemented on GaragaNet; many of them were suggested by our dealers," said Maxime.

"Garaga dealers highly appreciate our software," said Maxime. "With this acquisition, we will have more volume to continue software and product innovations." North Central Door dealers will be able to benefit from Garaga's advanced resources. "We certainly intend to leverage our existing technologies and software within the North Central Door dealer network."

GARAGA'S EXPANSION

Notable milestones

- 1983** Michel Gendreau acquires the assets of Garaga Doors Ltd., a company that had been making garage doors in Saint-Georges, Quebec, since 1979. The first product from Garaga is a lightly insulated aluminum garage door in a choice of six colors.
- 1986** Garaga invests \$1.2 million [USD] into the construction of a new plant in Saint-Georges.
- 1990** The company launches its own production line for residential and commercial garage door hardware.
- 1991** Garaga lands a \$2.5-million contract to produce insulated panels used for thermal reinforcement of the Manic-5 hydroelectric dam in Northern Quebec.
- 1993** Garaga launches its first steel residential and commercial garage doors.
- 1995** The firm opens a new 40,000-sq.-ft. manufacturing plant in Barrie, Ontario.
- 2000** The company builds a new 128,000-sq.-ft. manufacturing plant in Saint-Georges.
- 2006** A 30,000-sq.-ft. expansion is added to the Barrie plant.
- 2018** Garaga purchases Mid-America Door of Ponca City, Okla.
- 2022** Garaga acquires North Central Door of Bemidji, Minn.



The whole package

Garaga strives to help their dealers succeed by offering them access to a vast product line, the technology of a major manufacturer, and the personal touch of a family-owned business.

According to Maxime, "Working with a family-run manufacturer means our dealers will have access to the owners and upper management of each plant. Facilities are operated autonomously with a strong focus on servicing their own dealer base."

Dealers should also know that Garaga is in it for the long term. "We are in the business of growing lemon trees to get lemons year after year, not squeezing them and being done with it!"

Staying humble

Even though Garaga has grown significantly over the last 15 years, they have kept the same mindset and vision. "The most important thing we can do is listen to our dealers," Maxime said.

"Our father always told us, 'You can talk too much, but you can never listen too much' and this mindset is really part of our DNA and company culture."

One way Garaga learns from its dealers is by hosting annual advisory councils with dealers in each of its markets. "I humbly believe our dealers know more about our industry than we do. So, listening to them is how we keep improving and becoming better at fulfilling their needs."

Maxime said, "My father taught us to be humble. But what does that mean and how does that translate to our day-to-day?"

"For us, it means we should surround ourselves with people that are more knowledgeable than us in their field of expertise. We listen to our dealers and learn from them. We develop products and programs to make them even more successful, which makes us successful too."

Garaga has built their business implementing this philosophy for the last 40 years, and this is how they intend to continue to grow the company for many more. ■