Roger and Pat Van Hemelryk are the founders of Maplewood Meats, a state inspected retail meat market and custom processing plant in Green Bay, Wisconsin. Roger’s knowledge of the meat packing industry, gained while employed at Armour & Co., and Pat’s background as the daughter of a local butcher and farmer made a meat market a natural career choice when Armour closed in 1980. In 1983, they purchased farm land on the outskirts of Green Bay and broke ground for their new business. Roger’s ideas and Pat’s constant encouragement are the bases for the business’s successes.
The original building was 3,400 square feet with one 10-foot retail case. After four additions, the building has increased to over 35,000 square feet, with over 85 feet of full service case. The business is still family-owned and operated with ownership shared among Roger and Pat, son David and his wife Vicki, and daughter Lisa. Each family member has an active role in running the plant and retail store. While Roger shares plant managing duties, perhaps his most important contribution is his interaction with customers. Roger wants to make sure the customer comes first. “A happy customer is the best advertising you can get.”

Through 2010, Maplewood Meats has received 152 cured meat product competition awards from the Wisconsin Association of Meat Processors, 51 national cured meat product competition awards from the American Association of Meat Processors (WAMP) and 5 international competition awards in Germany. Maplewood has also been awarded three of WAMP’s Governors’ Trophies, which recognizes the best overall product of the WAMP product show, including two Dennis R. Buege trophies for sausage products and one R.W. Bray for whole muscle product. In addition, Maplewood Meats received the inaugural “WAMP Excellence in Product Manufacture Award” in 2009 recognizing their consistency in manufacturing high quality products for product show competition.

Roger is a member of WAMP and AAMP and has served on the WAMP board for many years. In 2008, Roger was awarded the WAMP Man of the Year, the Association’s highest honor bestowed to signify commitment, dedication and excellence in the meat industry.

Maplewood Meats strongly supports FFA, 4-H, and numerous fairs throughout Northeastern Wisconsin and Michigan’s Upper Peninsula by spending their weekends purchasing animals to support youth. They regularly donate materials to area schools’ science classes and very generously donate products to worthwhile organizations such as the Red Cross and other charities.

Maplewood has an open door approach to processors from Wisconsin and elsewhere who are new to the business and looking for help or who are looking for ideas or ways to grow their business. They have eagerly given time and resources to assist fellow processors. For example, several food safety videos were developed at Maplewood Meats and distributed as resources for meat plants challenged with meeting new food safety regulations. Maplewood has hosted workshops for Wisconsin processors to explain in detail their business, their failures and their successes. Maplewood believes that the key to growth is to continually invest in processing equipment that improves plant efficiency and product quality. Maplewood’s growth has provided an excellent example for other plants ... with goals that can be reached. Their facility leads the way in equipment, technology and vision. High speed slicers, high volume packagers, and a high speed on-the-rail carcass fabrication line are examples where they show others....”it can be done and this is how”. This industry leading role has inspired many meat processors to build their businesses or take the next steps.

By sharing their ideas and business successes with others, Roger and Pat Van Hemelryk hope they can stimulate continued improvement in standards and quality throughout Wisconsin’s meat processing industry. It gives Roger and Pat great pleasure to share their business experience with those who are just starting out. They want to see the smaller meat markets succeed. This husband and wife team truly exemplifies what all Wisconsin meat processors should aspire to be.