



For almost 120 years, Red Wing Shoes has been making footwear to keep workers safe and comfortable in the most challenging environments.

CREDIT: RED WING SHOES

Writing on the wall

Work and safety footwear brand Red Wing Shoes is preparing to celebrate 115 years in business next year. In the build-up to the anniversary, it began to publish online the stories of customers who have worn its boots in a variety of safety, industrial and rugged environments and are living proof that the values instilled by founder, Charles Beckman, still hold true at the end of the second decade of the twenty-first century.

Mr Beckman sold shoes in Red Wing, Minnesota, to loggers, miners, farmers and others who needed to brave the often harsh conditions of the region to earn a living. Seeing a gap in the market, he decided to develop his own footwear, products with the durability and high levels of performance required to meet the needs of these workers while also providing the comfort that he felt such hard-working people deserved. He introduced the first Red Wing boots in 1905.

Classic look

The products the company makes today attract customers in more than 100 countries and many of their properties continue to reflect Mr Beckman's priorities, often combining a

Messages of appreciation for its products that safety and work footwear brand Red Wing Shoes has received, from millers, miners, loggers, farmers and other workers who have to brave challenging conditions, appear on a special Wall of Honor that the company has created and made public.

classic look with up-to-date components and materials. The SuperSole 8-inch boot, for example, is a high work boot that uses Poron cushioning material to provide comfort, a proprietary welting construction and outsole, a fibreglass shank to protect against puncture and a steel toe.

The leather in this boot and in all the other boots and shoes the company makes comes from Red Wing Shoes' own

tannery, SB Foot, located in the same town. The tannery is best known for its oil-tanned leathers, which are water-, stain- and perspiration-resistant. These materials also give a more natural look and feel, the company states, because fewer finishing agents have been applied, allowing the natural beauty of the leather to shine through.

Another style, the Loggermax 10-inch boot has steel in the shank and, as upper material, SB Foot's Stormtough Gaucho leather. Like the SuperSole 8-inch, this one, too, has Poron cushioning and a steel toe, but it uses Goodyear welting and Vibram's Tacoma outsole.

As befits footwear that is made in the US (as more than 60% of the brand's footwear still is) from such carefully crafted materials, Red Wing products are not the cheapest in the safety footwear market (the recommended retail price for the Loggermax 10-inch boot is around \$385 per pair). The company encourages its customers to consider these boots as an investment and to look after them well.

Real-life stories

When he joined Red Wing Shoes in 2014, the company's chief marketing officer, Dave Schneider, said he knew buyers of boots that are a bit more expensive than many competitor products would be certain to give him and his team plenty of feedback. This was an accurate prediction. But something that took him by surprise was that, in many cases, customers did not want just to give a quick, two-line review of their purchase—they had detailed stories to tell about Red Wing boots they, a colleague or a relative owned or had owned and loved in the past.

From this, Mr Schneider developed an idea to elicit a whole series of true-life stories of the adventures and dangers Red



The SuperSole 8-inch boot is a popular choice from the Red Wing range.

CREDIT: RED WING SHOES

Wing Shoes customers have endured and publish them on an online 'Wall of Honor'. This appeared on the brand's website for the first time in 2017, then again in 2018 and plans are already under way for further follow-up editions, adding a human and a heritage touch to celebrations of the 115th anniversary of the company.

There are impressive accounts among the inaugural Wall of Honor contributions. One customer shared his tale of a mobile electric scissor lift running over his foot, causing him to suffer only "some minor nerve and tendon damage", in spite of the equipment weighing more than 2,645 pounds (1,200 kilos), thanks to his Red Wing boots. Another told of having Red Wing boots for his work as an industrial electrician and wearing them with protective clothing on his motor bike one evening when he was the victim of a hit-and-run collision. He said this left him "sliding across the freeway at 50 miles per hour". The boots saved his ankles and feet from injury, save, he said, "a tiny kiss from the asphalt" on the inside of his left foot, at the base of the big toe, where the abrasion had worn a small hole in the upper of the boot. He said he regarded this as "a slap on the wrist to remind me of how lucky I was".

Other accounts include boots helping people survive lightning strikes, prevent them from slipping while working on communications towers and from coming to harm in hazardous chemical environments. Mr Schneider has been left to conclude that what some customers feel for Red Wing footwear is "fervour and love". He has made it clear that in a marketing career spanning more than 25 years he had never encountered anything like it and he wanted to put the footwear brand's fans' comments into writing on the wall.👊



The Loggermax boot uses Goodyear welting construction and a Vibram sole.

CREDIT: RED WING SHOES