



## **The combined Berner Group celebrates 50 years**

### **From a one-man business to an international direct seller**

*Künzelsau, Germany, 17.04.2007:*

**On 1st April 1957 Albert Berner opened his first screw business at Künzelsau in southern Germany. Over the following 50 years the founder built up the company from a one-man business to an internationally renowned direct seller. Today the combined Berner Group is a leading European direct seller of small parts to the building construction and automotive sectors as well as other industries.**

### **From a screw business to an international concern**

Albert Berner's success is due to his own determination. At the age of 21, after completing a commercial apprenticeship, he set up in business on his own in the cellar of a house in Künzelsau: 3000 Mark and an old car was all the start-up capital he had when he set out to become a screw wholesaler. With untiring energy and a constant flow of new ideas, he steadily managed to expand his business. Twelve years later he was able to open companies in Belgium, Switzerland, France and the Netherlands. Many more companies were to follow. Today the combined Berner Group is present in over 20 countries in Europe as well as in Taiwan. In Fiscal year 2005/06 more than 7000 employees – over 4500 in field sales – achieved net sales of around 720 million euros.

Albert Berner initially focused his attention on motor vehicle workshops and garages. Then at the beginning of the 1970s he widened his product range to include items for the construction industry – the sector which today represents

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the largest proportion of net sales. As a direct seller of fixing and fastening products, Berner today supplies over half a million companies throughout Europe. Over the years, Albert Berner has steadily expanded the product range – initially limited to screws and fasteners – to include tools and workshop equipment as well as chemical products. In 2002 the Berner Group took a fifty percent shareholding in the chemicals group WIGO-Caramba in Bad Kreuznach/Duisburg. Caramba is one of the best known and respected brands in the chemicals sector. Then in 2006 Berner purchased the remaining shares in the group, an important step to strengthen the core chemicals business.

### **Responsibility for employees and to society**

Not only entrepreneurial spirit but also a sense of responsibility towards employees and society is what underlies all the actions of the company's founder Albert Berner – this not only applies for the headquarters in Germany but also for all the group companies throughout Europe.

In 2004 when investing him as a "Knight of the Legion of Honour", the French President, Jacques Chirac, described Albert Berner "as a shining symbol of success and the entrepreneurial spirit". Thus, for example, at the French group company, Albert Berner set up special workplaces to allow handicapped people to be employed. In total 1300 people work for Berner France.

In 1995 the Albert Berner Trust was set up by the company's founder with the aim of supporting cultural and sporting events in the Hohenlohe area and as a way of saying thank you to the people of the region for all the support he has received from friends, employees and others over the years. In the same year, Albert Berner was awarded the Service

Cross of the Federal German Republic for his entrepreneurial achievements as well as for his social and cultural commitment. On his 70<sup>th</sup> birthday, 12 July 2005, he was presented with the Federal German Cross of Merit - 1st Class for his exemplary role in business and society and for his many activities to the benefit of the people in the region.

### **Family business on a firm foundation**

Albert Berner, who withdrew from the day-to-day running of the company in 1997 to become chairman of the Advisory Board, looks to the future with confidence. He is convinced that the combined Berner Group will remain on its successful path over the next 50 years: "Our business is built on a firm foundation. We have laid the plans for the coming years and we will continue to expand the business." The Chief Executive Officer, Jörn Werner, who together with Ulrich Lindner, Chief Operations Officer, and Lothar Aulich, Chief Financial Officer, is in charge of running the company, is also optimistic: "Berner's strength as a direct seller is that it is absolutely customer oriented." One great advantage is that it is a family business: "Albert Berner has invested continuously in the business and driven it forward. At the same time he has provided security for employees and placed great store on the company remaining independent." And this approach will not change in the future.

(100 Zeilen, 4762 Zeichen)