



Back row: Brand Manager Nick Andrews, Founder Jerry Wydner, National Sales Manager Michael Wydner and Director of Sales and Marketing David Langston. Front row: Founders John Wydner and Jim Barta, who is shown holding the innovative Ultra-Lite X-treme.

“Pretty much everything in the hunting industry trickles down to one thing, and that’s performance,” says Hunter Safety System Director of Sales and Marketing David Langston. “Whether you’re talking about a broadhead or a pair of boots or an arrow, it’s all about performance. Hunter Safety System is different from all of that because we’re about saving lives. This is what we do every day. Treestand safety is all we do.”





Founders Jim Barta, Jerry Wydner and John Wydner hold up two of Hunter Safety System's latest products, the Ultra-Lite X-treme and the Lady Pro Series.

The inspiration for the original Hunter Safety System vest came, appropriately, from a treestand accident. "I tell this story often," David says. "Basically, two brothers, John and Jerry Wydner, and their close friend Jim Barta grew up together hunting and fishing. In 2000, they were on a hunt together in south Alabama, and the base of John's climbing treestand slipped off his feet. Luckily, he was able to grab the tree and slide down, so he wasn't hurt too badly.

"John got on the radio and called his brother. He said, 'I think I'm okay, but you better come check me out.' Once Jerry made sure John was okay, he asked, 'Were you wearing your safety harness?' John looked up at him and said, 'Well, were you?' And Jerry said, 'No, but I'm not the one that fell.'

"They went back to their camper and the three of them—John, Jerry and Jim—sat down and said, 'You know what? This is crazy. We have kids and grandkids at home. What a shame it would be to be crippled or killed doing something that we love to do.'

They all owned safety harnesses, but the harnesses were such tangled messes that they were tough to put on. John felt that if he could just take his harness and put it inside a vest, it would be easier to put on and he'd be more likely to wear it. So John went home and had his sister-in-law sew his design for him. That's how the Hunter Safety System was born, and it just grew from there."

John's innovative design eliminated many of the frustrating aspects of existing safety harnesses. "A key feature of the Hunter Safety System is our unique patented loop system," says David. "That allows the user to adjust the harness without having to deal with weave-through buckles or dangling straps, which is what hunters don't care for. That makes our products much easier to put on and therefore much more likely to be used. That loop system separates us from the other harnesses on the market today."

Over the past ten years, Hunter Safety System has become known for its exceptional customer service and for its top quality products. But for the owners and employees of Hunter Safety System, the company measures its success by the number of hunters' lives saved.

"Last year, 20 of our fellow hunters died doing an activity that we love," David says. "That is tragic to us. We all long for the year when not one hunter dies falling from a treestand. That's our goal here at Hunter Safety System. And we feel like we provide the products that can allow that to happen."

As easy as it is to prevent injuries and deaths from treestand accidents, a majority of hunters still do not wear a full-body safety harness. And that's a problem that Hunter Safety System is working hard to correct.

"Seventy to as much as 80 percent of hunters don't wear a safety harness," explains David. "So we became heavily involved with the International Hunter Education Association and we created a program for Hunter Instructors. There are 72,000 Hunter Instructors throughout the U.S., and they teach roughly 700,000 students a year. So we feel this is a great avenue for us to highlight the importance of treestand safety."

"We ask Hunter Instructors if they agree that treestand accidents are the most common accident in the outdoors. It's not four-wheelers, it's not gun accidents. It's treestand accidents. They

all agree with us. So then we ask if that's what they're spending the majority of their time in the classroom on. Most of them aren't. So we're working to educate Hunter Instructors on treestand safety so they can better educate hunters on it."

In addition to its work with the IHEA, Hunter Safety System has partnered with some of the biggest personalities in the hunting industry to promote the importance of wearing a full-body treestand harness.

"When I first came to Hunter Safety System six years ago," David recalls, "Jerry Wydner told me, 'David, your toughest job is going to be making safety cool.' I said, 'No, that won't be hard. We're going to put our products on all the cool people.' I'd worked at Muzzy before coming here, and one of the most

Everyone on the hardworking Hunter Safety System team is dedicated to both treestand safety and the success of the company. Below are Hunter Safety System's talented office personnel. From left to right: Jill Karr, Megan Felks, Melanie Wydner, Sally McCollum and Judy Korpi.





John Wydner's near-tragic fall from a treestand provided the inspiration for the original Hunter Safety System vest. Today, John does most of the designing and testing of HSS products.

Safety System in as many places as possible. Dealers are really excited about it.”

Hunter Safety System is also taking advantage of social media to get its message in front of as many hunters as possible. “We got heavily involved with Facebook last year,” David says. “We’re proud to say that we have over 150,000 fans. Very few companies in the hunting industry have that kind of fan base. What’s even more impressive is the number of ‘Likes’ and comments we get every time we post something on our Facebook page. We get great feedback, and Facebook has been a huge avenue for us to further educate people on the importance of treestand safety.”

Maintaining close contact with its customers is a critical

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important things I learned from Muzzy’s Michele Eichler is the importance of relationships. I’d established relationships with a lot of the great personalities in the hunting industry, and I was able to go to those personalities and share our message. I explained that with Hunter Safety System, they not only had the opportunity to endorse products they believe in, but they also had a chance to make sure that a fellow hunter’s next hunt is not his last hunt. That’s something we’re very sincere about.

“I think that having those personalities wearing our vests has absolutely increased the number of hunters who wear a Hunter Safety System. These personalities are very influential, especially when it comes to the young, up-and-coming hunters. They look up to these guys, and it’s very important that the TV personalities are wearing safety harnesses.”

Recently, Hunter Safety System has also partnered with other key manufacturers in the outdoors industry to provide added value to its customers. “We’re very excited about this,” says David. “One of my biggest frustrations was the fact that when a hunter walks into a retail shop, he only sees Hunter Safety System products in the treestand or harness sections. Basically, he has to go into the shop looking for our product. I wanted to get people to see Hunter Safety System in other places.

“To make that happen, I approached other companies about cooperating on a rebate program with Hunter Safety System. If a consumer purchases a product from one of these other manufacturers and a Hunter Safety System product, they’re eligible for a rebate. We’re trying this out this year with Barnett Crossbows and with Rocky Boots, and this is something we’re going to be doing even more next year. Our goal is to get Hunter

The top hunting personalities in the industry rely on Hunter Safety System vests to stay safe in their treestands. Ralph, Vicki and son RJ Cianciarulo never leave the ground without their HSS vests.





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component of Hunter Safety System's success. Customer input plays a large role in the development of new Hunter Safety System products. Feedback from consumers allows Hunter Safety System to design vests that meet their customers' needs, which makes those vests more likely to be worn in a treestand.

"We continually listen to the customer," David says. "We listen to their needs and their wants. We get ideas for how we can make our vests better. Our original harness was big and heavy. It was constructed from a 7-ounce cotton fabric, so it weighed about 5 pounds. It was reversible with blaze orange on one side and camo on the other. Our customers told us they loved the harness but that it was too hot. So we designed our Pro Series vest, which was mesh and was lighter and cooler.

"We also developed a price-point item called the Treestalker based on customer input. The Treestalker is just a simple harness. The fabric is lighter, and it's economically priced. And over the last

Quality HSS vests are packaged with an instructional DVD to ensure correct usage.

year and a half, we've developed a harness unit without a vest—again based on customer requests—that we call the Ultra-Lite.

"We get a lot of great ideas from consumer concerns, compliments and even criticism of our existing products. That input really helps us come up with new products."

For 2011, Hunter Safety System introduced the new Ultra-Lite X-treme, an ultra-lightweight harness that boasts the company's popular binocular straps as well as Realtree AP camo. In addition, all adult Hunter Safety System harnesses now come with a Lineman's Climbing Strap, a Tree Strap, the popular Deer Drag—which is also used as a suspension relief strap—and an instructional DVD.

Hunter Safety System has also introduced the Lady Pro Series, a safety harness designed specifically for female hunters.

"A lot of people think that the biggest growth in the hunting industry last year came from crossbows, but it was actually female hunters," David explains. "So we wanted to create a safety harness that meets their needs. Now, the one thing I know about designing a harness for women is that I don't know anything about designing a harness for women. Luckily, we have some of the best female pros out there. So I was able to go to women like Tiffany Lakosky, Vicki Cianciarulo, Kandi Kisky, Michele Eichler, Ginger Morehead and many more to get feedback. We are fortunate to have women with so much influence within the industry to help make something a little more form-fitting for the ladies out there.

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Diligence and attention to detail are critical when making a product designed to save lives.





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“What I found fascinating is that the ladies do want to be different from the guys, especially when it comes to new female hunters. So our Lady Pro Series features just a touch of pink as an accent to set it apart, and that design has become very popular with female hunters.”

In addition to safety harnesses, Hunter Safety System also produces a number of treestand-safety accessories. “Our most popular accessories are the rope-style Tree Strap and our Lifeline System, which has become the most important piece of treestand safety equipment other than the harness itself,” David says. “Our Lifeline System allows hunters to stay attached to the tree from the moment they leave the ground to the moment they return. That’s the next phase of safety education that we’re starting to push.

Yes, wearing a full-body safety harness is important. But even more important than that is staying attached to the tree from the moment you leave the ground until you come back down.”

In order to ensure that all Hunter Safety System products meet the company’s high standards, the company performs extensive testing.

“All of our vests and harnesses have to be certified to TMA standards,” explains David. “The TMA—the Treestand Manufacturer’s Association—is a great organization that sets standards for treestands and treestand accessories. Jerry Wydner is actually on the TMA Board of Directors.

“Our products are tested at an independent testing laboratory



to make sure we meet TMA standards. We also do our own in-house testing as well. John Wydner usually does that. He’ll go out and grab products randomly out of the packaging to test with a big mannequin here. We check everything—the design, the buckles, the safety features. Testing is very, very important. We are very big on testing our products and the standards to which they’re all built.”

Customer service is also important at Hunter Safety System.

“We do whatever it takes to make sure our customers are 110-percent satisfied,” David explains. “We talk once a week about how we can improve our customer service and how we can best follow up on calls if there is an issue. Customer service

is so important to us. It’s just as important as the quality of the product itself.”

Currently, Hunter Safety System has 17 employees in its north Alabama facilities. The company recently acquired a 25,000-square-foot facility and still maintains its existing 20,000-square-foot facility. The company does 25 percent of its manufacturing in those facilities, with the rest of the manufacturing being done overseas.

“Some people are frustrated when they see our products are made overseas,” acknowledges David. “But because of the seasonal nature of the hunting industry, it’s almost impossible to keep a factory busy year-round. Hunters usually buy hunting gear from

Keith Karr (above) in Hunter Safety System’s new manufacturing facility in north Alabama. In addition to the new 25,000-square-foot facility (below), the company still maintains its existing 20,000-square-foot facility.



August to November. If we did all of our manufacturing here, we'd spend time training employees that we would have to lay off during the off-season. And we wouldn't be able to keep up with demand during the busy times. That's what forces a lot of manufacturers—not just Hunter Safety System—to manufacture products overseas.”

The strength of the Hunter Safety System team plays a huge role in the company's success. David makes it clear that the company is made up of a number of talented individuals who all care deeply about treestand safety.


“Our newest employees are Michael Wydner and Nick Andrews. Michael is our national sales manager. He works with our dealer base. He also works with me on key accounts, and he works with our sales rep groups. Nick, who came to us from Scent-Lok, is our new brand manager. We're very excited about being able to bring all of his talents in-house. He's going to be helping us with our catalogs, photography, web design and maintenance, packaging design and point-of-purchase displays.

“Then there's Megan Felks, who is in customer service; Melanie Wydner, who handles all of our dealer and distributor business; Sally McCollum, who is our EDI specialist; Judy Korpi, who is our office manager; and Jill Karr, who is our accountant. Then three warehouse employees who are really key people on a day-to-day basis are Stan Wilder, Brian 'Catfish' McCollum and Britney Walden. And of course John and Jerry Wydner and Jim Barta are still the owners.

“We're a very close-knit team, and a vast majority of those employees are related in some way. The owners have built such a talented team. We come in early and we stay late, and we do that because we love what we do. We love the company, we love John, Jerry and Jim, and we love what they stand for. This is a great place to work.

“I also have to mention our sales rep groups. We have two very good groups that are a big part of our success—Bill Gartland and Associates in the eastern U.S. and Steve Kauffman and Associates in the Midwest. I can't say enough good things about those guys. Everyone here is grateful for what they do for us. I look at sales reps a bit differently than many other people. I think they go hand in hand with our marketing efforts. If I'm doing my job in marketing, our sales reps can be order-takers instead of order-makers. And I think with our rep groups, the dealers are going to know who their Hunter Safety System rep is.”

Few companies in the hunting industry are dedicated exclusively to saving hunters' lives. The passion and commitment that the people behind Hunter Safety System share is readily apparent. From innovative, common-sense designs that better appeal to real hunters in the field to a tireless education initiative to a unique marketing campaign designed to make treestand safety cool, Hunter Safety System is working hard to achieve its goal of zero treestand-fall fatalities.

For more information or to read letters from grateful hunters who survived treestand mishaps thanks to a Hunter Safety System vest, please visit www.huntersafetysystem.com. 



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