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Frisco

# Longtime Frisco business Hutson Industries closes doors



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After nearly 50 years, the Hutson family business has closed its doors.

Hutson Industries made a name for itself in the semiconductor manufacturing industry with switching devices called thyristors. The millions upon millions of tiny chips it produced over the years can be found in a multitude of household products, from light dimmers to compact fluorescent bulbs to kitchen appliances.

But the company stood out among its competitors. In an era when successful high-tech startups were selling to larger corporations and chip manufacturing was shifting overseas, Hutson Industries remained family-owned and family-operated until it ceased production in July.

“I couldn’t have done it without my family,” 84-year-old Jearld “Jerry” Hutson said from the lobby of the plant on Hutson Drive just off Preston Road in Frisco. “My family’s always been an integral part. We’re a very close family.”

In the beginning, Hutson handled the manufacturing end while his wife, Wanda, oversaw personnel. Sons Dale, Charlie and Glen each earned technical degrees before joining the operation. Daughter Joan brought her business degree to what the family always referred to as “the company.”

For decades, they made the company their home away from home. Work demanded many long nights and plenty of weekends. But the Hutsons often bonded together over lunch, whether it be at the office or a nearby restaurant. Sometimes they met at the family home in Richardson, where the menu often featured produce harvested from the 1-acre garden behind the high-tech plant.

“It’s been a good ride,” the oldest son, Dale Hutson, 63, said over a recent family meal at the Hacienda Ranch restaurant. “It’s kept the family together.”

### **Dad a ‘pioneer’**

Dale was 13 when his parents started Hutson Industries. He speaks proudly of his father’s work in the chip industry. “Others did it, too, but he was a pioneer in it,” he said.

Jerry Hutson started the business in the garage and an upstairs bedroom of his Richardson home in the mid-1960s. He was a self-described genius who had a knack for inventing.

“I was a geek, a child prodigy,” he said, recalling the thrill as a boy when his father bought him a room full of radios to tinker with and learn from. That build-it mentality has persisted throughout his life, whether he was creating parts needed for his business or constructing a home for his family.

Hutson married in 1949 and worked various jobs before getting hired in 1957 at Texas Instruments, where he got his experience in chip manufacturing. He then worked at a couple of startups with partners before deciding to venture out on his own. Hutson estimates he’s held nearly 40 patents over the years — all of them since expired or sold off.

Hutson Industries was profitable from the start, he said. Operations shifted from the family’s Richardson home to a storefront in Garland to a plant in Farmers Branch. Other locations opened, including in Dallas and Mexico.

In 1976, the family decided to consolidate operations and build a plant in Frisco. With about 200 workers, Hutson Industries became one of the largest employers in what was then a small farming town in Collin County.

### **Chinese tariffs costly**

Fast-forward to today, when only three employees remain to help with decommissioning the plant. Closing the family business wasn't easy. The Hutsons blame Chinese tariffs on semiconductors for pricing them out of business after all these years.

George T. Haley, co-author of the book *Subsidies to Chinese Industry*, said the tariffs became a problem for Hutson Industries as did government subsidies in China for semiconductor manufacturers.

But during its tenure, Hutson Industries earned a solid reputation for good service and a quality product, Haley said. The Hutsons' longevity in the industry also stands out, he said.

"What really made it unique is that it remained family-controlled," Haley said.

Today, a sales contract is pending on the company's 57 acres in Frisco. The plant will be torn down. A new residential development with retail fronting Preston Road is expected to take its place. And most of the Hutsons are looking ahead to retirement.

Daughter Joan Hutson said it's sad to see an end to the business after all these years. But one thing remains constant. "We're still together as a family," she said.

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