

## Playstructure firm's profits "swing up, jump and climb"

From a modest beginning in Ottawa, Hilan Creative Playstructures Limited, now based in Almonte, Ontario, has become a leader in the construction of play parks across Canada and in the United States.

The company, founded by Al Potvin and his wife Barbara, sells some 200 playstructures a year. They are carefully-designed honeycombs of pressure-treated pine that form platforms linked by ramps, stairs, ladders and bridges and interweave with slides, fire poles, steering wheels, tires, nets, polyethylene tubes, monkey bars and swings.

For decades, playground equipment typically consisted of a set of swings, a slide and sand, with severe limits on both the variety of play possible and the demands on children's dexterity. But in the past decade, integrated wooden playstructures have appeared across Canada and US playgrounds and school yards, offering children a wealth of activities.

### Instant success

Integrated playstructures were common in Europe for some time and were an instant success when first introduced into the Ottawa area. Al Potvin, president of Hilan, installed the first playstructure in the area for the city of Gloucester in the spring of 1973. By the end of the year, he had more work than he could handle. Today the company employs 55 people and is grossing nearly \$6 million in sales annually.

Winning orders first in the Ottawa and Nepean areas, Potvin began selling playstructures across the province of Ontario.



Hilan Playstructures president Al Potvin.

Potvin estimates that there are now more than 2 000 playstructures in place in ten provinces and 10 per cent of the current business is in the US. He is beginning to expand into European markets as well.

Hilan offers some 29 different basic designs, all modular with interchangeable elements. Each sells for \$6 000 on average.

### Diversified products

The company has also developed playstructures suitable for handicapped children. These structures emphasize motion, cooperative play and the extension of physical limits.

Over the years Hilan has successfully diversified both vertically and horizontally. It

now owns a wolmanizing plant in Kemptville Ontario, where the pine lumber is chemically treated to resist rot. The bulk of the plant's production is sold in the eastern Ontario retail market. Potvin estimates that Hilan supplies more than half the retail market in treated wood, used in decks and other outdoor construction.

The company now also manufactures nearly a dozen other products serving the public recreation field, including park benches, litter baskets, picnic tables, bicycle racks, water spray posts, exercise stations for fitness trails, backyard playunits and pedestrian bridges. Ottawa's bus company buys a large number of wooden benches from the company each year.

Hilan also makes and sells about 75 Taracycles a year, the hand-propelled tricycle developed by an Ottawa man for a handicapped daughter.

## Grain exports lead way

More than 30 million tonnes of grain and their products were exported by Canada for the crop year 1983-84, thereby establishing new grain export records in the country for the fifth consecutive year.

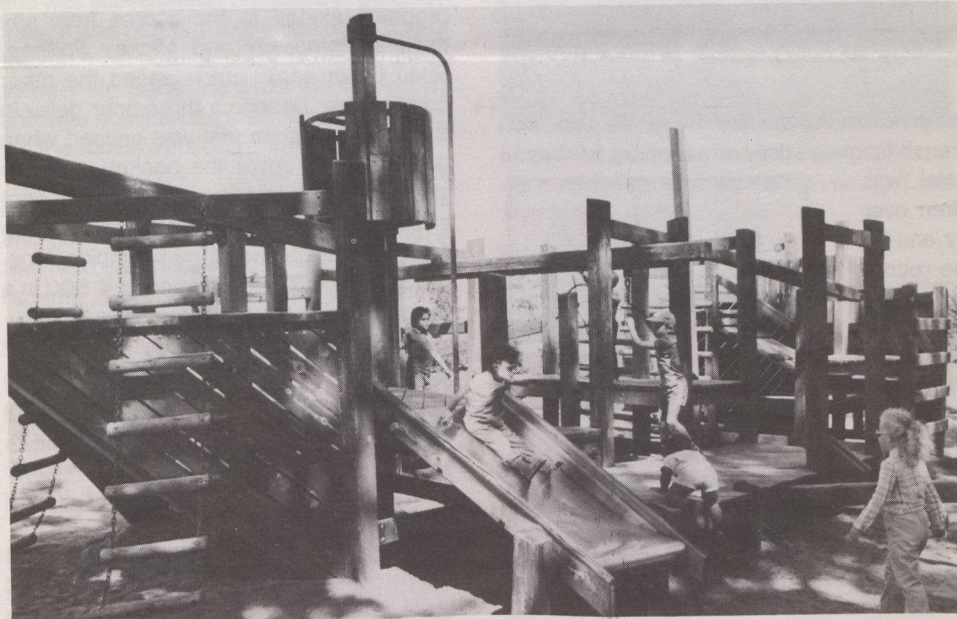
Wheat exports accounted for most of the sales reaching a new high of 21.7 million tonnes.

The major export markets for wheat were the USSR and China, but important new markets were also developed during the year. India and Egypt imported over one million tonnes more Canadian wheat than in the last crop year and markets were consolidated in Nigeria, Iran, Iraq and Mexico where some two million tonnes of wheat were sold.

Barley is Canada's second major grain export. East Germany, the European Economic Community and Japan accounted for more than half of the 5.6 million tonnes exported in 1983-84. Major new export markets were developed in Singapore, Turkey, Syria, Mexico and Eastern Europe where 1.7 tonnes of barley were shipped. Under a recent long term agreement, Canada sold 950 000 tonnes of barley and 50 000 tonnes of durum wheat (used for pasta products) to East Germany this year.

Canadian canola/rapeseed is the country's third most important grain export. Last year, 1.5 million tonnes were sold with Japan accounting for 75 per cent of Canada's canola/rapeseed exports.

Rye is also becoming an important grain export. Record shipments of 750 000 tonnes were made in 1983-84 compared to 314 000 tonnes in 1982-83. Japan, Korea and Taiwan were major customers.



The Citizen Photos

Children in Andrew Haydon Park in Nepean enjoy many facets of a playstructure from Hilan.