

## *It all started with Robinson*

# The legacy lives on and on

By **CHERYL WADE**  
of the Daily News

Why did a big plastics industry build around the small town of Beaverton? People in the industry say it was because some pioneering thinkers lived close by, and because The Dow Chemical Co. wanted to be part of the action.

One of the pioneers, who founded what is now Lyle Industries, is Bill Oberloier. As Oberloier recalled, the grandfather of Beaverton's plastics industry was Fred Robinson, founder of Robinson Industries.

Robinson, who had worked for Dow, helped develop Styrofoam during World War II, said Jerry Kaleto, Robinson's son-in-law and Robinson Industries' vice

president of sales.

After the war, Robinson worked in a Dow research laboratory to develop peace time uses for Styrofoam. Eventually, he started and began molding polystyrene foam.

In the early 1950s, Robinson's company was a pioneer in making door panels for refrigerators, Kaleto said. Later, the refrigerator companies started making their own panels. But the auto industry started using Robinson's processes to make trays for shipping auto parts, Kaleto said.

Oberloier, and Brown Machine founder Gaylord Brown, built machinery that Robinson used. Robinson was the designer, the visionary for the area's plastics industry, said Annette Sobolews-

ki, Oberloier's daughter and a plant manager at Lyle Industries.

"Gaylord Brown was the manufacturer of Fred's designs," she said.

Oberloier worked for Brown, then started what is now Lyle Industries to build equipment that trimmed edges off plastic bottles.

Since the early years, the plastics industry has grown. The work of these three pioneers spawned about 20 plastics companies around mid-Michigan, Sobolewski said.

Robinson Industries, which is actually in Coleman, now employs 350 people. The company is capable of processing 2 million pounds of plastic into pieces each week