

ISSUE  
**40**  
APRIL 2025

**GREAT GRIZZLY**

# TIMES



Get Ready for

## DEMO NIGHT

**May 10, 2025 • Muncie, IN**

SCAN TO REGISTER ON PAGE 6!

**Plus**  
**A Look Back**  
**at 70 Years**  
Things You Didn't Know...

**Guessing Game**  
Tariffs & The Future of Fireworks



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 NCI North Central Industries

## President's Letter

# 70th Year In Business Things You Didn't Know...

The company that is now NCI was started by my father, William J Shields in the early 1950's. My mother, a registered Nurse and my father, a salesman for Mail Pouch Tobacco moved to Muncie as my mother got a nursing job at Ball Memorial Hospital. My father then quit his sales job and started a business named North Central Sales Company. His business model was calling on businesses such as groceries, variety stores and drug stores, selling variety goods and seasonal items not provided by their wholesale suppliers. He operated out of a step van (exactly what UPS uses today). This vehicle was stocked with all the supplies that he was selling. Typically, he sold each item by the 1/2 dozen or dozen or gross. After a few years, he was operating a half dozen vans doing weekly routes around North and Central Indiana. Each employee would drive the van on a specific route each day of the week.

In 1955 he started purchasing fireworks as part of his on-van products to provide as a seasonal product for July 4th. In the beginning, it was several sizes of USA made sparklers and later added some items such as roman candles and other American made fireworks. His supplier was United Fireworks, Inc., Dayton, Ohio. Mr. Walter Beachler was the owner. He was a manufacturer of these devices and was a prominent company in the fireworks manufacturing business. Years later his son, Don Beachler took over the business and later they became part of ANCO, which is now TNT Fireworks.

When I was about 10 years old, he would take my older brother and myself to the warehouse to help his staff stock sales vans. Occasionally my father would take my brother and I to purchase fireworks from the United Fireworks, Inc. facility. Then my father decided to make fireworks assortments under his own label to sell to his retailers as part of his seasonal fireworks products. Later in 1967 he changed our company name and incorporated the business as North Central Distributing, Inc. A few years later we opened our own company fireworks outlet under the name, American Heritage Pyrotechnics, Inc. which was registered as a corporation on 2-26-69.

When I joined the business in 1975, we were still doing some variety goods along with fireworks sales. My father had expanded his territory and by then we were doing the original chain stores, many of them were customers of my fathers, but now they had started additional stores in other towns.



My job was basically to add more stores to this list. At our peak we were doing close to 1,000+ stores. Stores like Meijer, Kroger and Target bought fireworks each year for their stores from NCI. We provided full service which included our crews setting up end cap displays in customer stores. My father figured out early on that these end cap displays helped us to sell more product. Later in 1976 we changed our company name to, North Central Industries, Inc.

By the early 1980's we were buying both from Hong Kong fireworks exporters and US manufacturers like United Fireworks, Elkton Sparkler, Acme Specialties and Longhorn Manufacturing. We started doing our own labels for products and our line of fireworks assortments during this time. By October, 1992 we had incorporated the name, Great Grizzly, Inc. and the logo was added to our packaging and products.

Shortly after in 1992, Great Grizzly and its logo was granted a US Trademark. Since then, we have added many new product names and other trademark brands to our product line. In 2021, NCI added the Fire Factory brand to our list of US Trademarks. Later the Chain Link brand was developed and trademarked. This Chain Link style device was also granted a function patent on July 4th, 2023.

Changes to our business model continued. By the end of the 1990's we had transitioned NCI from just a vendor supplier of fireworks to retail stores to a full line fireworks importer and wholesaler. The next large expansion occurred in 2016 when we purchased a property in Forest Park, GA, just a few miles from the Atlanta International Airport. This has become our southern US office, warehouse, and distribution center.

NCI continues to embrace change as a constant in the fireworks business. We have added new sources of fireworks products made in India, Cambodia, and Brazil. We find the fireworks import business to be ever changing and we intend

to be on the forefront of those changes. We began as small wholesale company started in the 1950's to become a company with international connections and worldwide suppliers. Change has obviously been very good to us.

So now we are celebrating our 70th year in the fireworks business! We have great products and great people. Come to one of our demo's or just give us a call. We're here to help.

Yours in fireworks. Onward and upward to increasing sales for July 4th, 2025. For recent updates on any and all fireworks business issues visit us online at [www.greatgrizzly.com](http://www.greatgrizzly.com).



**Richard B. Shields**  
Owner/President

**NCI**  
NORTH CENTRAL  
INDUSTRIES, INC.





Unpacking Tariffs and the Future of Fireworks

# Guessing Game

## The Secret Answer Is...



Are we off to a wild 2025 or what?! We've had some interesting and unpredictable events in the past decade, but I would say what we are seeing in 2025 is a new breed. As with every situation that involves politics and diplomacy, this situation is fluid and could totally have changed between the time of this writing and the time it is distributed for you to read. We've fielded a lot of phone calls collectively with customers, vendors, suppliers, and even industry peers wanting our take on tariffs, ocean freight, and the impact these things will have on the industry for 2025 and beyond.

The team at NCI has a fair amount of skin in the game within the industry. As highlighted last Winter, NCI has representatives on all 3 major fireworks associations' boards of directors as well as participation in many of the committees that facilitate action and solutions within those organizations. We also sit on the AFSL board, the Indiana Fireworks Distributors Association board, as well as belong to several other state associations.

Allow me to offer a short recap on what has transpired since the summer selling season of 2024. In July 2024, ocean freight increased by roughly 23%, which has held steady for the most part. Between September and December, looming labor strikes on the east coast increased freight going to the Atlantic an additional 10-15%, which has since dropped off. China prices on goods took a modest increase overall.

On February 1st, 2025 newly elected President Trump enacted an additional 10% tariff on goods coming from China effective immediately. Fireworks were previously excluded from the tariffs the Trump Administration imposed in his first term, so at that time the industry was looking at a net tariff of 10%. In 30 days, the administration doubled down and attached another 10% on goods coming from China, for a total of 20% tariffs on anything shipped after March 4th.

On April 2nd, deemed "Liberation Day", President Trump announced reciprocal tariffs with the United States regular trade partners that will take effect as early as April 3rd at midnight, and will be fully implemented no later than April 9th. Fireworks will be assessed a 20% existing tariff + 34% reciprocal tariff + 5.3% standard duty. On April 8th, President Trump announced an additional 50% reciprocal tariff on China for a total import tax of 109.3%. This is charged on the value of the merchandise at the time it is loaded onto an import container prior to transportation from its place of manufacture. We are currently awaiting news out of D.C. as to if the industry may see some exemption due to no path to manufacturing in the US.

It is worth noting that the National Fireworks Association and the American Pyrotechnics Association have joined forces to present a united front in Washington D.C. Both organizations are pooling their resources to work multiple angles in the interest of getting these tariffs completely or partially lifted. This will be a big relief not only to industry but ultimately to the end users who will bear the increased costs when planning out their 4th of July celebrations. The organizations are keeping interested parties informed via social channels and providing more detailed information to their members via e-mail.

The work both organizations are doing takes resources, so if you aren't a member of one or both, please consider joining today to help contribute your support to these efforts. They are offering a convenient path to generate letters specifically targeting your local, state, and national representatives based on your place of business. Please take the time submit online at [www.americanpyro.com/advocacy](http://www.americanpyro.com/advocacy).

Like many scenarios in business, the situation is truly a guessing game. Here is a secret answer that I will share with all of you that has always proven a good remedy to any challenge related to the supply chain. Understand the climate

of the industry and always be in a favorable inventory position. If you run out of product, or fall extremely short, you are out of business or at best left too much on the table.

With that said, we don't know what is going to happen, other than with all landed goods having tariffs now, which may continue to increase. The outlook for 2026 pricing is less favorable than 2025. It is a forgone conclusion that 2026 will be a banner year for the fireworks industry, so one might be smart to hedge your bets and understand that between now and the end of 2026, the best opportunity to buy product at the lowest price is going to be in the next 30 days.

It is also a certainty that if tariffs stay consistent or increase, it will be a necessity for fireworks importers to raise their prices in the late summer or early fall of 2025. This is essentially your opportunity to "buy the dip" as stockbrokers would say, take advantage before it is too late! Here's to a successful selling season and supporting each other in these uncertain times!



**KURT**  
**Kurt Cowgill**  
Vice President



### In Memorium

## Donald R Peters, Age 86

NCI lost a friend and customer in the passing of Don Peters, Green Bay, Wisconsin on March 23, 2025. I had known Don for 40+ years. Even though we sold Don and later his widow, Jeane for many decades, I really thought of Don as more of a friend.

He was an old school salesman and old school wholesaler. Don originally did paper goods and close out products which he did at a high level of success. He was just as successful when he added fireworks to his line of products.

Don was a great salesman with a gift for gab. He also had a very sincere side to him. His customers were very loyal to Don and he reciprocated. Likeable and fun, Don enjoyed doing his businesses. He was sharp, canny and always had a new joke to tell. It was easy to like Don. What you saw was what you got. I enjoyed every encounter with Don. I will miss his quick mind and wit. He liked people and it showed.

Don opened a couple very successful retail operations in Wisconsin as well. His business will be continued by his wife, Jeane.



# Expert's Arsenal

Check out some of the showstopping new and featured items that customers will be talking about in 2025.



**Steven Irvin**  
Director of Operations

## SUPER FINALES

What makes a Super Finale you ask? They are our top of the line 500g and compound cakes that are the perfect finale to any show. Great Grizzly's 2 Minute Warning and Fire Factory's 100 Shot Super Finale have been best sellers for years but in 2025 we are going all out! First, we have a second flavor of 100 Shot that is all red, white, and blue effects with the same aggressive performance that customers know and love. The other 2 new additions come in the form of compound cakes. The 1,000G Super Finale with 2 500g cakes and the 1,500g Super Finale with 3 500g cakes let the shooter take their show to the next level! These compound cakes have a left angled cake and a right angled cake that are designed to be lit at the same time creating one massive finale.



SEE THEM IN ACTION!

**DEMO  
NIGHT**

MAY 10 • MUNCIE, IN  
SCAN HERE TO REGISTER!



## QUIET ITEMS

We get questions all the time about quiet or silent items. While a truly silent item is hard to come by our line up of quiet items is growing! New for 2025, we have 500g Silent But Deadly 20 Shot and the 200g Feeding Frenzy 25 Shot. With these new additions joining Island Time 18 shot, Silent Disco Fountain and Piece of Cake Fountain we now offer 5 different items across 4 different categories.

## PREDATOR

New this year in our Predator series is the Predator Blackout single shots. These single shot pre loaded canister shells give you all the performance of the legendary predator shells without having to reload. Don't let the height of the tube fool you these go just as high and break just as hard! Speaking of the legendary OG Predator shells check out the new red, white, and blue anniversary edition box on the Predator 6 and 24 packs.

## GIRANDOLAS

Girandolas have been very popular in recent years. Great Grizzly's High Limit and Alien Assault have been two of the top Girandola cakes on the market and now we are adding 2 other varieties. Space Dust is a slightly smaller 500g with 10 big color changing breaks leading up to the flying UFO finale. The best part is this cake is at a price point that more customers can afford. Finally, we have Up, Up, and Away 200g from Dominator. At an even better price point this is a high quality, high flying, Girandola that scream into the sky before breaking into a silver palm.





# DEMO NIGHT

MAY 10<sup>TH</sup> MUNCIE, INDIANA

# 2025



SCAN HERE TO REGISTER

## Introductions

### JEREMY GAMBOA

I am happy to become part of the team and will do everything I can to learn and grow. Working in the warehouse prior to starting in the sales role has allowed me to see all perspectives of this business. I've been able to learn about the products and the needs of our customers at the same time.

Originally from California, I was suprised to see how extensive our inventory is. The performance was unlike anything I was used to seeing. Some of my personal favorites include Tailspin, Super Stinger, Complete Chaos, and High Limit! I cannot wait to continue learning and growing in the fireworks industry, and I look forward to meeting many of you - our customers. If you have any questions about myself or our products, you can reach me at (909)806-0745. I would be happy to help!



### EMILY BINFORD

I recently started as an Administrative Assistant at NCI in Muncie. My work background has been in Healthcare Administration for the last 7 years. I'm venturing out and putting my business degree to work. Outside of work I enjoy spending time with my husband Austin and our 18 month old daughter Adalynn. We love to travel and be outside! I look forward to meeting everyone! Can't wait to collaborate and bring success to the 2025 season!



## Roll Call

**RICHARD B. SHIELDS**  
PRESIDENT/OWNER- 49TH SEASON

**KURT COWGILL**  
VICE PRESIDENT- 19TH SEASON

**STEVE IRVIN**  
DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS- 10TH SEASON

**AJ BURNS**  
AREA SALES MANAGER- 9TH SEASON

**ANGELIC WOOD**  
ACCOUNT PAYABLE- 11TH SEASON

**GABI SPURLOCK**  
EXECUTIVE ASISTANT- 2ND SEASON

**EMILY BINFORD**  
ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT- 1ST SEASON

**SEAN ALEXANDER**  
WAREHOUSE MANAGER - 27TH SEASON

**DUSTIN ALEXANDER**  
ASST. WAREHOUSE MANAGER- 5TH SEASON

**BRENDA SAID**  
PRODUCTION MANAGER- 28TH SEASON

**ZACH ROYAL**  
TRANSPORTATION MANAGER- 4TH SEASON

**NICO SOUZA**  
INT'L BUSINESS MANAGER - 3RD SEASON

### GEORGIA DIVISON

**JEFF BRANDENBURG**  
VICE PRESIDENT OF SALES- 9TH SEASON

**ANGELA BRANDENBURG**  
REGIONAL MANAGER- 8TH SEASON

**TYLER BRANDENBURG**  
SALES AND DISTROBUTION MANAGER- 8TH SEASON

**TREVOR BRANDENBURG**  
DISTRICT SALES MANAGER- 8TH SEASON

**SANDRA JIMENEZ**  
ACCOUNTING CLERK- 7TH SEASON

**MARIA STEPHENS**  
ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT- 5TH SEASON

**ADRIAN GONZALES**  
WAREHOUSE MANAGER -5TH SEASON

**JOHN FEIGERT**  
SALES REPRESENTATIVE- 7TH SEASON

**JEREMY GAMBOA**  
SALES REPRESENTATIVE- 2ND SEASON

**GISELA RAMIREZ**  
ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT- 1ST SEASON

## Dates + Details

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[WWW.FRIENDOFFIREWORKS.COM](http://WWW.FRIENDOFFIREWORKS.COM)

**NATIONAL FIREWORKS ASSOCIATION**  
NFA FALL EXPO - ROGERS, AR  
SEPTEMBER 8-12, 2025  
FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT:  
[NATIONALFIREWORKS.COM](http://NATIONALFIREWORKS.COM)

**PYROTECHNICS GUILD INTERNATIONAL**  
2025 CONVENTION - BOONE, IA  
AUGUST 2-9, 2025  
FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT:  
[WWW.PGI.ORG](http://WWW.PGI.ORG)

**AMERICAN PYROTECHNICS ASSOCIATION**  
2025 ANNUAL CONFERENCE - INDIAN WELLS, CA  
SEPTEMBER 23-26, 2025  
FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT:  
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