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Connecticut aerospace manufacturer makes state-of-the-art dreidels, a symbol of company's founder

By Susan Dunne
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Scott Livingston, president and CEO of Horst Engineering, stands next to the company's history wall holding some of the dreidels they manufacture, East Hartford on Dec. 9. His grandfather started the company in 1946. Photo by Cloe Poisson/Special to the Courant (Cloe Poisson / Special to the Courant)

In the traditional song, children make dreidels out of clay. Wooden or plastic dreidels can be bought by the 30-pack, for about \$10. But an East Hartford manufacturer has kicked the dreidel game up a notch. For the holiday, Horst Engineering makes state-of-the-art dreidels from aluminum, stainless steel and titanium, precision-engineered, like the aerospace components Horst makes the rest of the year.

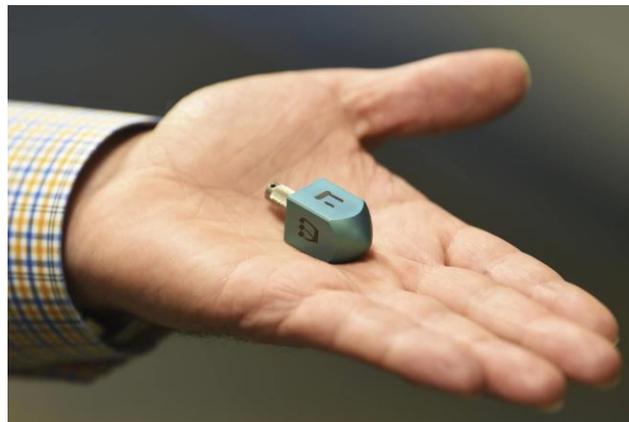
“We make screws, bolts, nuts, studs, pins, sleeve and bushings for aircraft. The dreidels are made by the same people, with the same processes, the same precision,” said Scott Livingston, president and CEO of Horst. “They are perfectly balanced and strong.”

Each Horst limited-edition dreidel comes with a stamped certificate of conformance to demonstrate the quality put into the manufacturing.

The shiny, tiny tops are not inexpensive: \$54 for aluminum, \$68 for stainless steel and \$72 for titanium. But Livingston said the dreidels are more than just a Hanukkah plaything.

“It can be seen as a toy, but we think of it as being more like a symbol,” Livingston said.

What the dreidels symbolize is the company itself, and its founder. Horst was founded in Hartford in 1946 by Livingston’s grandfather, Horst Rolf Liebenstein. Liebenstein, a Jewish mechanical engineer living in Bad Liebenstein, Germany, emigrated to America in 1938, escaping the menace of the Nazi regime.



Scott Livingston, president and CEO of Horst Engineering, holds an example of the dreidels his company makes for the holidays, East Hartford, Conn., December 9, 2022. The dreidels are made in either aluminum, stainless steel or titanium. His grandfather started the company in 1946. Photo by Cloe Poisson/Special to the Courant (Cloe Poisson / Special to the Courant)

“He got out one month before Kristallnacht,” Livingston said. His brothers escaped, too, both settling in Africa. Their parents did not escape, and died during the war. Their home in Bad Liebenstein was confiscated.

At Ellis Island, Liebenstein Americanized his name to Harry Livingston. He came to Hartford, married Sylvia Hurwitz and started Horst on Garden Street, in the second floor of a barn.

In 1950, he moved the business to East Hartford, where it grew for more than 70 years. A few years ago Horst moved into a new building, spacious enough to accommodate 30 more years of growth.

Harry Livingston died in 1998, one year before the family reclaimed the Bad Liebenstein house with the help of the United Restitution Organization.

A few years ago, Livingston wanted to make a few small items to make manufacturing relatable to children.



Some of the dreidels made at Horst Engineering are on display at the East Hartford aerospace manufacturing facility, East Hartford, Conn., December 9, 2022. The dreidels are made in either aluminum, stainless steel or titanium and are sold in time for Hanukkah. Photo by Cloe Poisson/Special to the Courant (Cloe Poisson / Special to the Courant)

“We made a variety of products a child could hold in their hand and understand: key chains, airplanes, golf tees, tops, yoyos, a snowman ornament,” he said.

There was another reason to make the toys. “You want to do things that set you apart from other shops,” Livingston said.

Some of the items flopped. “The yoyos were too heavy. They didn’t work right,” he said. Others did well. The dreidel was an offshoot of the top, added to the lineup of cute little novelties in 2017.

In 2020, Livingston decided to sell some of the dreidels. “The pandemic was going on and we wanted to do something joyful,” he said. They sold out. They sold more in 2021.

The dreidels also symbolize Livingston’s own life. His father is Jewish. His mother is Catholic.

“I have a Christmas tree and a menorah in my house,” he said. “Some people would think this is heresy, but we drill a little hole in it so it can be hung on a tree.”

To buy a Horst dreidel, visit shop.horstengineering.com. For more information on the dreidel, visit horstengineering.com/horst-dreidel.