

12.17.19

Rounds Names Valley Queen Cheese Factory of Milbank as Senate Small Business of the Week

WASHINGTON—U.S. Sen. Mike Rounds (R-S.D.) today named Valley Queen Cheese Factory of Milbank as the Senate Small Business Committee’s “Small Business of the Week.” Rounds was invited by Small Business Committee Chairman Marco Rubio (R-Fla.) to select a South Dakota small business to be highlighted by the committee. Valley Queen Cheese was founded in 1929, and remains a family-run operation. It is the largest cheese plant in our state and the largest employer in Milbank.

“South Dakota is fortunate to have many thriving small businesses,” said Rounds. “It’s my honor to name Valley Queen Cheese in Milbank as the Small Business the Week. Valley Queen has been a family-run operation for four generations, and currently employs 300 individuals. It gives back to the community through its charitable foundation, which has awarded more than \$300,000 in college scholarships to local students. I thank the Nef and Gonzenbach families who started and continue to run Valley Queen Cheese for the great work they do for South Dakota.”

Today, Rounds submitted the following excerpt into the Congressional Record in honor of Valley Queen Cheese Factory:

Mr. Rounds. Mr. President, today, it is my pleasure to name Valley Queen Cheese Factory of Milbank, South Dakota, as the Senate Small Business of the Week. Valley Queen Cheese is a prime example of the important role small businesses play in their local economies and communities.

In 1929, Alfred Nef and Alfred Gonzenbach decided Milbank, South Dakota, was the perfect home for their business and founded Valley Queen Cheese. Four generations later, Valley Queen remains a family-run operation and is still owned by the Nef and Gonzenbach families. Today, it operates less than 1/2 mile from the original location. It is a recognized leader in the South Dakota business community and the greater dairy industry. Since 2017, Doug Wilke has served as CEO of Valley Queen. With guidance from the board of directors, he currently oversees the largest cheese plant in South Dakota and the largest employer in

More than 90 percent of all milk Valley Queen uses comes from South Dakota cows, and they make a conscious effort to continue South Dakota's leadership in this important industry. Thanks to a recent expansion, Valley Queen now has the capacity to produce 200 million pounds of cheese from 2 billion pounds of milk each year. Their cheese can be found in most local grocery stores, as it is sold to some of the best-known food brands in the world. To meet the growing demand, Valley Queen recently invested in a business expansion project that increased the factory's output by twenty-five percent.

Valley Queen is an active leader in the Milbank community where it has grown to employ 300 people. In 2017, the Valley Queen Charitable Foundation was established to advance positive change by supporting local organizations and initiatives. In its first three years as a non-profit, the foundation has contributed more than \$900,000 to local charities that have a community, educational or humanitarian focus. Since 1990, Valley Queen has awarded high school and college students over \$300,000 in scholarships. In addition to the business's own philanthropy, Valley Queen makes an annual contribution to the Milbank Community Foundation, which seeks to improve the quality of life of residents in the community.

Valley Queen has been recognized for their continuous improvement and exceptional process control through several awards. Earlier this year, Valley Queen won two awards and received near-perfect marks at the U.S. Championship Cheese Contest for their reduced fat cheddar and Monterey Jack jalapeno cheeses. Valley Queen's sustained efforts toward improved research and development does not go unnoticed by the industry.

Valley Queen is an excellent example of how small businesses fit the shared values and ideals of their community and give back in a multitude of ways. I am proud to highlight Valley Queen and its team for their integral social and economic contributions to South Dakota. Although many years removed from being a start-up company, Valley Queen remains committed to the legacy of its founders. Furthermore, Milbank South Dakota continues to serve as the perfect home for this thriving business. Congratulations again to the entire team at Valley Queen Cheese Factory for being named Senate Small Business of the Week.

###