



Built to Last

From humble beginnings to industrial prowess—how Rapid Gear has found success in the heavy industry market

Aaron Fagan, Senior Editor

From a small, rented space with a single machine to a reputable force in heavy industry, Rapid Gear's story is as much about resilience as it is about engineering excellence. Founded nearly five decades ago by Julian and Ana Sabados, Rapid Gear is more than a gear manufacturer—it's a testament to the power of hard work, determination, and a willingness to adapt to the needs of an ever-evolving industry. This article explores the journey of Rapid Gear, its milestones, industry impact, and the values that have anchored it in a competitive market. Through exclusive insights from company President Tania Sabados, we uncover how Rapid Gear has continually pushed boundaries, embraced new technologies, and cultivated a supportive company culture that nurtures both legacy and innovation.

Founding and Vision

Origin Story

In 1976, Julian and Ana Sabados, both immigrants to Canada from different regions of the former Yugoslavia, took a leap of faith. Julian, a trained mechanical technician, had spent nearly a decade working at Havlik Gear, gaining hands-on experience across different departments. Yet, he always envisioned more. Together with a fellow Yugoslav, he bought a machine, rented a modest space, and worked late into the night after finishing his day job, driven by the idea of building a gear shop of his own. This was the birth of Rapid Gear.

With three young children at home, Ana supported Julian's venture from behind the scenes, balancing the responsibilities of parenthood and the ups and downs of a fledgling business. "They came with nothing, and they didn't have much to lose," Tania Sabados says of her parents. "Their excitement came from building something they never imagined possible." Julian's initial partnership ended on February 14, 1980—the day his fourth child was born—but he and Ana forged ahead. They continued investing in the business, propelled by the shared satisfaction of seeing their efforts transform into a sustainable venture.

Early Challenges

Rapid Gear's early vision was simple yet ambitious: to create quality gear products while building a company grounded in integrity and grit. This meant investing in both machinery and people, a theme that has continued through subsequent generations. The Sabados family's resolve to grow from modest beginnings set the tone for a company philosophy that prioritizes quality, reputation, and adaptability over rapid expansion.

Pioneering Projects

One of Rapid Gear's earliest milestones came when it partnered with a raiseboring company in Northern Ontario. This mining company, itself in the early stages of growth, needed custom-made parts for its raiseboring equipment, and Rapid Gear delivered. The partnership was a turning point, providing the financial stability and industry connections that allowed Rapid Gear to expand its capabilities and reputation.

Another breakthrough came in the late 1970s with General Motors Diesel (now General Dynamics). Mowag, a Swiss company, was producing parts for military vehicles in Canada and faced difficulties finding a gear shop capable of meeting European standards. When Rapid Gear was recommended, they seized the opportunity, producing components to Mowag's exacting standards where other companies had failed. "We're still producing those parts today," says Tania Sabados, "along with several new generations of components." This success laid the foundation for decades of orders and solidified Rapid Gear's reputation for high-quality, reliable gear manufacturing.

Industry Evolution and Innovation

Adapting to Change

Since its inception, Rapid Gear has continually adapted to technological advances in the gear manufacturing landscape. In its early days, the company relied heavily on Maag machines for both roughing and finishing operations. Today, Rapid Gear utilizes faster milling techniques, advanced modeling, and robust tooling to rough out gears—including technically complex worm sets—before finishing them on Maag or Kapp Niles grinding machines.

Investments in equipment like large-capacity wire EDM machines and cutting-edge measurement tools ensure that the company can meet tight tolerances and deliver consistent quality. "We've made investments not just in our gear production, but in our entire machine shop," Tania explains. "It allows us to support a full range of machining and engineering services under one roof."



Julian Sabados and Tania Sabados

Staying Competitive

Rapid Gear's strategy to remain competitive focuses on strengthening its presence across heavy industries. "We're always working to make our name and capabilities known in sectors like mining, steel manufacturing, and press equipment repair," says Tania. These industries require dependable, high-precision gears, and Rapid Gear consistently delivers—thanks in part to its partnerships with material suppliers and subcontractors that help meet deadlines and expand capacity.

Products, Services, and Customization

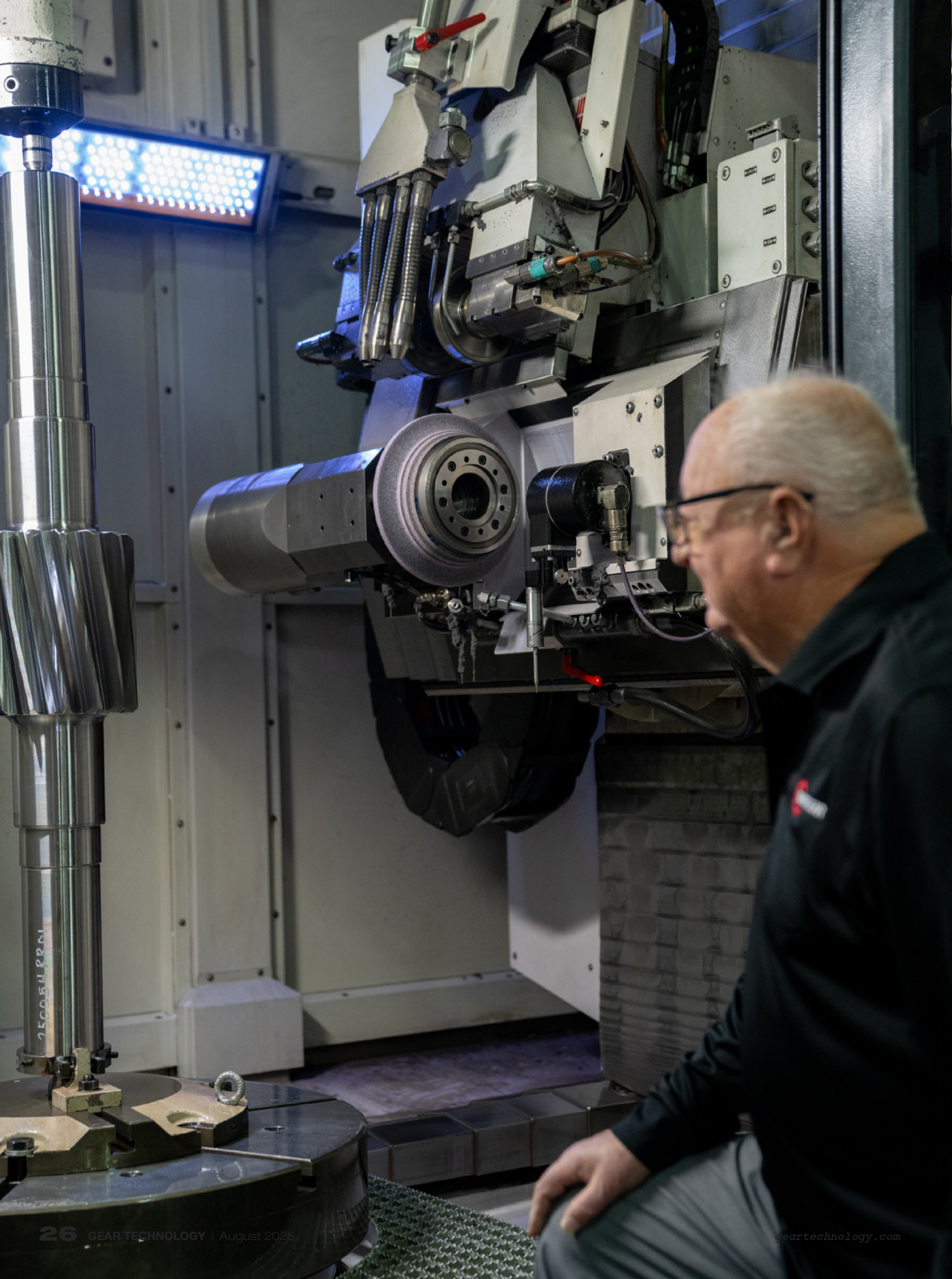
Customer-Centric Approach

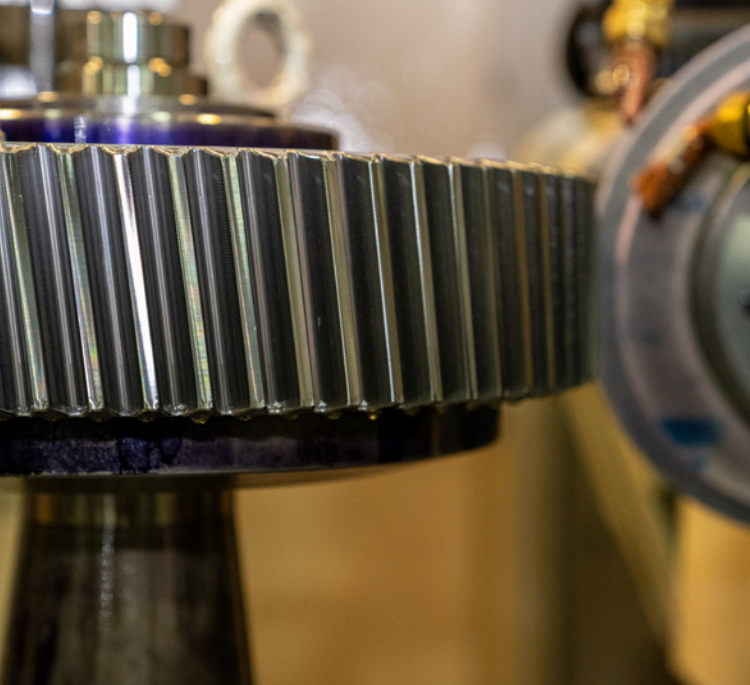
Customization is a core part of Rapid Gear's value. The company has built a reputation for tackling unique and complex industrial challenges through reverse engineering and creative problem-solving. "We're not afraid of a challenge," says Tania. "We've developed an engineering team that's capable of finding solutions for almost any request—and we've backed that with the right equipment."

This integrated approach has also expanded Rapid Gear's role in the repair and refurbishing space. "We've become a go-to for gearbox repair because we have the engineering support, the machining infrastructure, and decades of experience to do it right," Tania adds. "Even in tough economic times, equipment still needs to run—and that's where we come in."

Repair and Refurbishing

Rapid Gear's in-house capabilities and extensive job archives give it a unique advantage in gearbox repair. "We track the history of what we've done, which means faster, more accurate repair and reproduction," says Tania. Their precision-focused approach minimizes client downtime, providing critical value in industries where every minute of operation matters.





Client Relationships and Industry Impact

Serving Heavy Industries

Rapid Gear serves a wide spectrum of clients across the heavy industrial landscape. With the ability to produce gears ranging from 2 inches to 200 inches in diameter, the company plays a key role in maintaining and powering equipment of all shapes and sizes. “We produce gearing for almost every kind of industrial equipment,” Tania notes. “That includes everything from mining machinery to massive steel presses.”

Building Trust

Transparency and accountability are the cornerstones of Rapid Gear’s client relationships. “We’re honest about what we can do, and we stand behind our workmanship,” Tania emphasizes. “If something goes wrong, we show up—and we make it right.” That commitment has allowed the company to build lasting relationships, grounded in reliability and results.

Company Culture and Leadership

Values and Management Philosophy

Rapid Gear’s culture is rooted in humility, accountability, and teamwork. Tania describes her management style as hands-on and inclusive. “My philosophy is that I’m never too good or above anyone else to do what needs to be done,” she says. “If that means cleaning the toilets—then that’s what I’ll do.”

That kind of leadership fosters mutual respect and a positive work environment. Mistakes are treated as learning opportunities, not failures. “We’re in this together,” Tania says. “When something doesn’t go as planned, we support each other and figure it out as a team.”

Attracting Talent

In a competitive labor market, Rapid Gear sets itself apart by investing in people. The company offers competitive wages, supports apprenticeship programs, and maintains strong ties with

local colleges and trade schools. Tania serves on advisory boards and is active with the Canadian Tool Manufacturers Association (CTMA), advocating for trades and manufacturing careers. “We’re doing our part to make manufacturing visible again—especially to younger generations,” she explains.

Lessons and the Future

Overcoming Today’s Challenges

Managing a business in the gear industry comes with serious pressures, especially for family-run operations. “Even with a great team, the weight of financial responsibility and client expectations ultimately falls on leadership,” says Tania. “It’s a heavy burden.”

But those pressures have taught valuable lessons. “You can’t dwell on what you can’t control. You focus on what you can do—and do that as well as possible,” she adds. “Sometimes you have to make hard decisions about people and processes, but every time we’ve done it, it’s turned out to be the right move.”

Generational Continuity and Female Leadership

Rapid Gear’s continued success also reflects a powerful story of generational continuity and female leadership in a traditionally male-dominated field. The company remains proudly family-owned, with Tania Sabados—daughter of founders Julian and Ana—now serving as president.

Since assuming leadership in 2014, Tania has led the company through significant growth while honoring its founding values. “There aren’t many women in gear manufacturing,” she notes, “but I grew up in this world, and I believe strongly in its value to our economy and the skilled people who make it thrive.”

Her leadership has not only brought strategic innovation and investment but also reinforced the cultural foundation of mutual respect, integrity, and a deep sense of purpose. Tania’s role represents a positive and inspiring signal for the future of North American manufacturing—one where tradition and innovation move forward hand in hand.

Conclusion

Rapid Gear’s journey is a story of determination, innovation, and family values. From its humble beginnings to its current position as a trusted partner in heavy industry, the company has built a legacy rooted in quality, resilience, and adaptability. As Rapid Gear looks to the future, it remains committed to providing clients with the same excellence that has defined it for nearly 50 years. With a focus on technology, people, and partnerships, Rapid Gear continues to drive forward, proving that true success is built to last. From one generation to the next—supporting the North American industrial economy.

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