



Norpine's Management Team in La Crête
(L to R): Larry Buhler, Joe Elias, Bill Elias, Betty Eccles, Eva Elias, Jake Elias, Jake Wiebe & George Wiebe // Life Through a Lens Photography



TOP LEFT: High Level Management (L to R): Shawn Wiebe, Danny Wiebe & Ike Doerksen // That Girl Pearl Photography | TOP RIGHT: La Crête Team: Jake Wiebe, Jake Elias, Eva Elias, Joe Elias & George Wiebe // Life Through A Lens Photography | BOTTOM RIGHT: The High Level Team // That Girl Pearl Photography | BOTTOM LEFT: Norpine in La Crête

BORN IN ROSTHERN, Sask., Jake Elias, 75, moved to the La Crête area in October of 1963 with his parents and siblings. In 1968, he married his wife, Eva, and together they had two girls, Sharon and Gwen, and a boy, Scott.

"In March of 1970 we moved our family to High Level. In May and June of 1971, I went to NAIT in Edmonton to take the Partsman course," said Elias. "Then in August of 1971, Moro Machine closed their branch in High Level, so we ended up moving back to La Crête."

With experience and a keen passion for automotive parts, Elias realized the service stations and garages in La Crête needed a new business to order parts from. Luckily, he wasn't the only one to notice this, and before long a business idea started to take shape.

"Because of my experience in parts, I was approached by three business-minded people, Ben K. Peters, Bill Fehr and George P. Wiebe, who asked if I would like to join them and start a new business," said Elias.

Together, the four men purchased a lot with a

24'x30' building on it, and Norpine Auto Supply Ltd. was incorporated on February 22, 1972.

"Our first sale was either the same day or very close to it, so things felt promising right from the start," said Elias.

By 1979, Elias' business partners decided to move onto other ventures, so Jake and Eva bought out the last partner and decided to carry on with Norpine Auto Supply on their own.

Shortly after, they took out a loan from the Federal Business Development

Bank, which allowed them to buy a Data General Eclipse S-20 minicomputer with four terminals and a dot matrix printer—something that wasn't common for a business of this size.

"It had 64KB of memory, a huge 10MB of storage and it weighed around 250 pounds," said Elias. "The computer system with inventory control and account receivable program was worth around \$32,000. We were the second or third business to install a computer like that in Alberta."

By 1984 Elias joined a buying group, which allowed him to buy at better prices, but only in large quantities. This made it difficult to have enough sales without having too much inventory. So, the decision was made to open a Norpine Auto Supply branch in High Level with Frank Penner as manager.

At first, Elias rented a building for the High Level location; but after two years, he purchased the Caribou Motors Building. Then, in 1996, they built a new auto and industrial supply store, which they are still operating today.

In 1992, Danny Wiebe started at the High Level location as the counterman parts person, a role he fulfilled for 25 years. Since then, Wiebe has moved into management, and he oversees the ordering and inventory for the High Level location.

"There are two main reasons for Norpine's success. The first is the support of our customers and our community, and the second is the loyalty and dedication of our employees," said Wiebe.

In 1984, Joe Elias joined the Norpine Auto Supply La

Crête team and started out working with inventory—organizing, counting, displaying. He soon started working the counter and carved out a prominent role in sales. His interest in inventory control brought him into the position of purchasing.

In 1996, Joe was given the opportunity to buy into the business and became general manager, which lasted 25 years. In February of 2021, he sold most of his shares in Norpine and semi retired. Joe looks back fondly at his career and what they were able to accomplish.

"It boils down to the people. Over the years we had excellent employees who got along well and worked great as a team," said Joe. "Working at Norpine gave me opportunities to attend conventions and meet many suppliers within the business community and learn from them."

Another long-time employee, Jake Wiebe, started in 1994 at the High Level branch and moved to La Crête in 1996.

Jake Wiebe worked the counter for 17 years, then became the human resources and advertising



TOP: The Norpine La Crête Team | **BOTTOM LEFT:** Tim Bueckert & Jake Krahn (smiling)
BOTTOM RIGHT: James Peters // Life Through A Lens Photography

coordinator for 10 years afterwards. Most recently, he took over the general manager position from Joe in March of 2021.

"It's a family atmosphere here. You feel at home as soon as you walk in," said Jake Wiebe. "Working with Norpine has given me a better understanding of the importance of community and working together to make things happen."

Long-time employees has been invaluable for Norpine. In 1996, a new era was ushered in as shareholders were added—there have been 16 to date. Bill, Betty (siblings to Jake Elias) and Frank have served 40 plus years. Joe (brother to Elias), Larry Buhler, Jake Wiebe and Danny have served 30 plus years.

From the beginning, Elias made developing a familial

atmosphere a priority. Over the years it's been reinforced how crucial that was to their success and their ability to grow and survive difficult times.

"Success came with family support. I couldn't do it on my own. My wife, Eva, worked at Norpine whenever she could, and when the children were old enough, they helped as well," said Elias. "In

addition to my family, my staff made Norpine Auto Supply what it is today."

Expansion happened naturally. As it did, Elias ensured they had the space they needed.

"We started out with a 24'x30' building in 1972, and in 1974 we upgraded to a 40'x70' building. By 1984, after joining the buying group, we added on again, but it was never big enough," said Elias.

In 2001, Elias built a 150'x150' building, and still they needed more space. So, in 2014, he added another 150'x156' building, which sold to the current shareholders.

The original building Norpine started in is now at the Heritage Museum in La Crête.

With 50 years and counting, Norpine would like to thank everyone who has supported them.

"We've been blessed with excellent staff," said General Manager Jake Wiebe. "On behalf of the Norpine Team, we thank our loyal customer bases at both locations. You have supported us through thick and thin, and we wouldn't have reached this anniversary without you."

Norpine will be hosting a 50th Anniversary gathering on June 16th at Norpine in La Crête and June 17th at Norpine in High Level. There will be a car show and BBQ supper for customers and staff.

