

The Evergleam

Shiny **ALUMINUM CHRISTMAS TREES** became popular in the 1960s (not the 1950s) and a Manitowoc business, The Aluminum Specialty Company, became the largest manufacturer of these trees. Their tree, the Evergleam, was a product of utilizing another company's idea and improving it significantly. More than one million Evergleams found their way into American homes.

MAKING A GOOD IDEA GREAT ✨ The Aluminum Specialty Company of Manitowoc had been manufacturing aluminum toys for decades when they stumbled upon a new idea. In December 1958, Aluminum Specialty toy sales manager Tom Gannon noticed a metal Christmas tree displayed in a Chicago Ben Franklin store. Modern Coatings, Inc. of Chicago made the tree, but it was too expensive and bulky for a mass market. Gannon took the original tree back to Specialty and engineer Richard Thomsen led the effort to produce a better, cheaper version for the American Toy Fair in March 1959. Thomsen's team was successful, and the tree was well received by buyers. On a hunch, Specialty produced hundreds of thousands of trees in time for the 1959 holiday season, and the gamble paid off as sales soared.

Modern Coatings had patented both the drill hole angle, allowing for branches of uniform length, and the easy-to-use paper tube for housing branches. Since Aluminum Specialty had greater aluminum manufacturing expertise and access to national markets, the two companies entered into a licensing agreement.

SOMETHING DIFFERENT ✨ The massive appeal of aluminum trees derived from their novelty in a marketplace dominated by traditional holiday decorations and designs. They utilized new materials and had a modern, clean look. Aluminum Specialty never promoted their trees as "artificial." They offered a simple, easy-to-use decoration that was strikingly different from its competition.

After a successful first year, production took place year-round, sometimes requiring three shifts. Sales peaked in 1964–1965, and throughout the 1960s, Aluminum Specialty's Evergleam brand had a 60–65% market share in the United States and Canada. Primary outlets included regional stores and national chains such as Montgomery Ward, Ben Franklin, and Woolworth's. 75–80% of all Evergleams came in silver, with the remainder in other colors.

The branches on Evergleam aluminum Christmas trees were derived from a World War II military product. American airplanes dropped tiny strips of metal, called chaff, to block enemy radar. Evergleams utilized similar finely cut foil, which could be easily twisted into various forms.

The Aluminum Specialty Company produced over one million Evergleam trees during the 1960s, and most were silver and either six or seven feet tall. As competition in the marketplace increased they produced a variety of tree types and sizes.

Typically, people used color projectors to splash light on to the silver branches, but Specialty began to produce a number of trees with **colored branches** of green, gold, and pink.



The first style of tree branch featured straight "needles," but the Aluminum Specialty Company began to make different styles such as the **"pom-pom" tree**. This slight change at the tip of the branch resulted in a much fuller appearance and provided more surfaces for light reflection.



By the later 1960s, other manufacturers were making higher quality aluminum trees. Specialty responded by producing a line of high quality trees such as the

Evergleam Tru-Taper, which had the most branches of any tree (139) of varying sizes producing a lush appearance.



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