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AWARDS

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Amgen congratulates the winners of the 2019 Manufacturing Excellence Awards. We are proud to join you. It is hard work, innovation and dedication to manufacturing that brings us all together. We applaud your pursuit of excellence – as your contributions and commitment make the state of Rhode Island and our communities stronger.



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Gallo|Thomas is proud to sponsor the 2019 Manufacturing Awards. We congratulate the outstanding group of 2019 honorees and salute your unique attributes and business acumen. Gallo|Thomas is passionate about serving our clients, our employees, and our local community – and delighted to share this special evening with the companies and individuals honored this year.

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

People, not machines, key to success

THE POPULAR IMAGE of manufacturing is big machines making big things. But nothing could be further from the truth, as the profiles of the 2019 Manufacturing Awards program winners affirm.

Manufacturing leaders, from individuals to companies, know that the newest and fanciest machines



are not going to get the job done without the full engagement of their employees and fruitful relationships with customers.

Take Michael Brandmeier, the winner of this year's Leadership & Strategy award. Brandmeier is known to be a mentor to his staff, believing that getting the right people into the right jobs is what makes Toray Plastics (America) Inc. such a high-performing enterprise.

In fact, the company's vice president of corporate human resources and environmental health and safety, Lisa A. Ahart, says that Brandmeier is "very committed to the organization, but he's more committed to the people and seeing them do the best they can."

Nye Lubricants Inc., a 175-year-old company based in Fairhaven, works directly with its customers – who can range from aerospace to the automotive markets – to help them, as the company says, "solve their problems."

New ideas are the seeds of improvement, and empowering employees to explore them is one way to keep them going. At Edesia, Ron Yanku, the plant operations director, feels complete freedom to implement new ideas.

"With backing from the top down, we're unstoppable," he said.

This year's Manufacturing Awards program is only possible, as are all PBN recognition programs, because of the generous support of the business community, who not only provide financial sponsorships but enter the programs and compete for top billing with other Rhode Island enterprises. This year presenting sponsor Polaris MEP took on a large role, but our partner sponsors – Amgen, blumshapiro, Bryant University, Cox Business and Gallo|Thomas – were crucial to the success of the 2019 Manufacturing Awards.

Mark S. Murphy
Editor

ON THE COVER:
PBN PHOTO/RUPERT WHITELEY



Coaching, mentoring vital to Brandmeier's style

BY NANCY KIRSCH | Contributing Writer

TORAY PLASTICS (AMERICA) INC. may be an industry leader in manufacturing because of its commitment to quality, service and innovation, but President and CEO Michael Brandmeier gives much of the credit for the company's success to hiring the right people.

Lauding the company's 700 employees – approximately 550 at its North Kingstown factory and another 150 at a plant in Front Royal, Va. – Brandmeier said, "We try to find people with the drive, work ethic and desire to succeed for the company, themselves and their families; that's what makes them successful."

His role, he said, comes down to coaching, mentoring, listening, encouraging and helping the right people in the right jobs overcome difficult obstacles and challenges.

Lisa A. Ahart, Toray Plastics vice president of corporate human resources and environmental health and safety, said Brandmeier's leadership style has been highly effective.

"His style is open; many people come to him for informal guidance and leadership. He's very committed to the organization, but he's more committed to the people and seeing them do the best they can."

Toray Plastics (America) Inc., a subsidiary of Japan-based Toray Industries Inc., makes polypropylene and polyester film at its North Kingstown facility, and its customers range from family-owned companies to Fortune 500 corporations. Its films are used as flexible packaging for food, as well as solar-control window films, wire and cable insulation, and sail cloth, among other applications.

With growing competition from overseas, Brandmeier said, "It's been necessary for us to find new products and new markets to maintain the health of our business. Toray Plastics, which has one of the largest research-and-development groups outside of Japan, received between 10 and 20 patents each year for the past two years."

Also, investments in a new building to house a state-of-the-art, 28.5-foot polypropylene film line will allow Toray Plastics to expand production and to make new products; completion is expected by fall 2020. Annual revenue of ap-

proximately \$400 million has remained consistent during the past few years.

Calling his ability to delegate and empower people among Brandmeier's strongest leadership skills, Ahart said, "[That delegation and empowerment] brought to fruition several multimillion-dollar projects, including major manufacturing-line expansions and equipment purchases."

Communication within the company is a top priority for Brandmeier. Last year, he launched a campaign, "Safety over Production," and an employee-driven initiative, "See Something, Say Something." He said Toray Plastics has had its lowest-reported injury rate in the past 20 years, with Occupational Safety and Health Administration-classified injuries dropping from 14 to fewer than five annually. As part of a multiyear strategic plan, the company installed an automated packaging line in 2017, meaning employees work more efficiently and no longer manually move rolls of film weighing as much as 1,500 pounds.

The country's low unemployment rate has made it more difficult to find qualified workers at Toray, whose workforce includes production-floor employees with high school and technical-school graduates, engineers and Ph.D. scientists. Still, the company averages an annual 7 percent employee turnover, compared with the average annual turnover of 20 percent in the manufacturing industry, Ahart said. "That tells us we're doing extremely well," she said.

In addition, Toray Plastics strives to create future opportunities for employees to

ensure the business is viable for the long term, Brandmeier said. A close relationship with the University of Rhode Island is invaluable, with many students becoming interns and graduates becoming full-time employees, he said.

Brandmeier said Toray Plastics' collaboration with the Japan America Society, which fosters cross-cultural relationships between the two nations, has been beneficial for the company, too.

Asked what distinguishes Toray Plastics from its competition, Brandmeier said, "We hire the best-in-class people, we have cutting-edge-innovative technology and we are very focused on meeting the needs of our customer base." ■

'[Brandmeier is] very committed to the organization, but he's more **committed to the people and seeing them do the best they can.**'

LISA A. AHART, Toray Plastics vice president of corporate human resources and environmental health and safety

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CUSTOM STAIRS: North Atlantic Corp. employee Dan Lovenbury, left, reviews plans for a custom-made staircase with Chief Operating Officer John Humphrey. CEO Peter Humphrey, third from right, talks about another project with Chief Digital Officer Michael Humphrey, second from right, and employee Joe Costa. PBN PHOTO/RUPERT WHITELEY

Throwing the doors open to a bright future

BY SUSAN SHALHOUB | Contributing Writer

DOORS HAVE BEEN around forever.

Even Fred Flintstone had a door on his home in “The Flintstones” cartoon. (Glass windows still hadn’t made it to the town of Bedrock, however.)

But in these days of keyless door locks and design advances, things have changed. Custom door, window and staircase manufacturer **North Atlantic Corp.** has turned to technology, robotics and acquisitions to shore up its company for the decades ahead.

Starting out 39 years ago with 12 employees in Somerset, NAC is now 750 employees strong, with four locations in New England and Tennessee.

The company is owned by Peter Humphrey and his sons Michael and John – CEO, chief digital officer and chief operating officer, respectively. The brothers have been coming to NAC with their dad since they were little. Now active decision-makers, the brothers interact with some of the same employees they did then.

The company has fully embraced growth via acquisitions and innovative productivity improvements. Major annual investments, along with its lean focus, keep the company competitive, with steady revenue increases.

NAC has made 15 business acquisitions so far.

Last year, it bought Central Woodwork and CenWood Appliance in Tennessee, its first acquisition outside of New England. Like NAC, the Tennessee company had been run by a family for several generations.

At the same time, \$500,000 worth of equipment was installed in NAC’s New England locations in 2018.

NAC launched its e-commerce website, Cleary365.com, for its residential wholesale building division, Cleary Millwork, of Somerset. The site is custom-designed for lumberyards selling doors, stairs and moldings, and it now handles about one-quarter of the company’s orders.

“We designed the whole platform ourselves,” said John Humphrey. “It’s a very intuitive

site.” It allows price quoting, product ordering and delivery scheduling.

“Once it’s generated a quote, it can convert that to an order and integrate it with the production schedule,” he said. A pricing toggle allows a dealer to collaborate with customers without displaying the dealer’s cost. The administrative dashboard also allows for the setting of price tiers.

“As an administrator, I can set a best-contractor price, a price tier for a homeowner, or for a specific job. That way, everyone in my company would be set for that price,” keeping quotes more consistent, Humphrey said.

Cleary365.com generated \$1 million in sales in its first 24 weeks, according to NAC, handling about one-quarter of all weekly quotes, freeing staff to convert orders into sales and value-added activities.

“It’s still in its nascency,” Humphrey said. “We’ll build out functionality as we continue.”

The company plans to introduce the system to its New England residential retail and Tennessee wholesale markets this year.

Humphrey welcomes an opportunity to talk about the more than \$1 million robotic and artificial-intelligence warehousing system being installed as part of a 40,000-square-foot extension to the Somerset location this year.

The door-picking system will allow NAC to maintain 100 percent accuracy on doors needed for production.

“Within this cage, there is enough space for about 30,000 door slabs, stacked from the ground up, each one a different SKU, stacked

80 high or so based on the inventory we are using,” Humphrey said. “It will intelligently rearrange stacks to make picking time more efficient.” Humans don’t have to lift the doors.

An operator is needed, however, to build pallets from that day’s production. But the machine picks the doors – in 27 seconds, said Humphrey – as opposed to a human’s average of one minute, 30 seconds. Robots and automatic conveyors will also be added to the pre-finishing production area.

With its robotics and family focus, NAC is like “The Jetsons,” looking ahead to find ways the company and its customers can benefit from technology.

“We need to figure out how to help people love their homes even more,” said Humphrey, “and make building easier.” ■

‘We need to figure out **how to help people love their homes even more** and make building easier.’

JOHN HUMPHREY,
North Atlantic Corp.
chief operating officer

North Atlantic

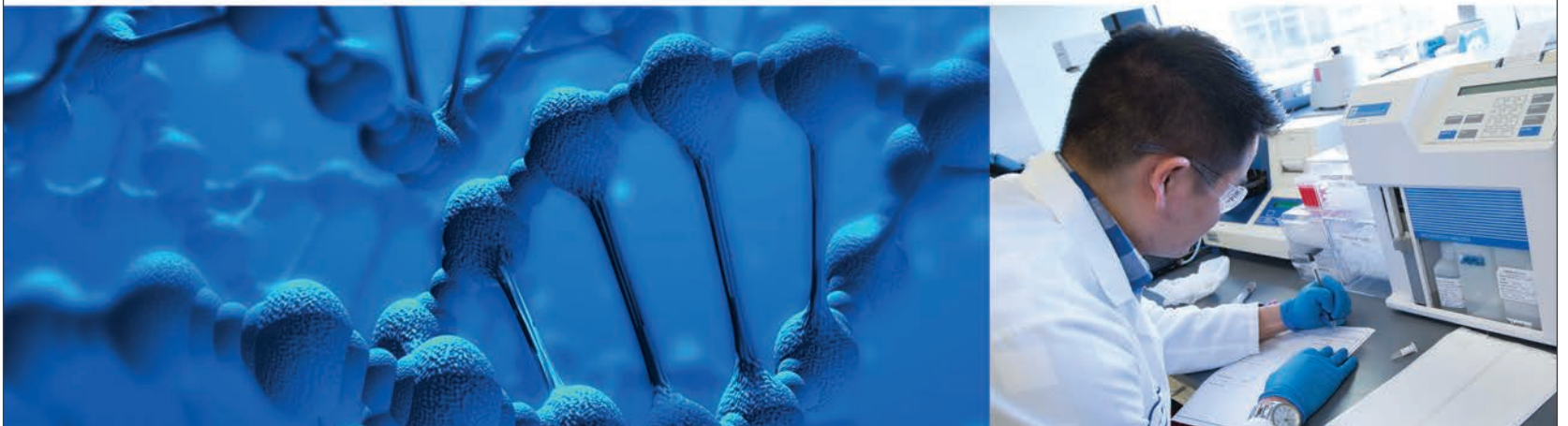


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Congratulations to this year's winners for their excellence in each category. Together, we help strengthen and reinvent Rhode Island's manufacturing industry.





A KEEN EYE: President and CEO George Mock, right, inspects a piece of machinery at Nye Lubricants, along with Jason Galary, center, director of research and development, and Gus Flaherty, manager of engineering development and applications.
PBN PHOTO/RUPERT WHITELEY

Nye smooths the way for its clients to thrive

BY SUSAN SHALHOUB | Contributing Writer

ANY COMPANY THAT HAS a founder related to TV star, inventor and best-selling author Bill Nye “The Science Guy” is already interesting.

But add the fact that **Nye Lubricants Inc.** has been around since the 1800s – it first produced watch oil made from the jaws of porpoises – and now makes lubricants for uses such as the Mars Curiosity rover, and it’s an even better story.

From oceans to outer space, Fairhaven-based, 180-employee Nye Lubricants has a long legacy of innovation – improvements it continues to strive for in developing specialty greases and oils.

“We have always been linked to innovation,” said company President and CEO George Mock. “Vacuum equipment ... the aerospace market; new, electric and hybrid automobiles. Our products are technologies that help make [customers’] products work better.”

Nye Lubricants was founded in Fairhaven by William Foster Nye in 1844. Bill Nye is a direct descendant of the founder’s brother.

With more than \$50 million in sales, the company has 28 channel partners that produce 50 percent of its demand outside of the United States. Nye’s customers include manufacturers of clean-room equipment, appliance and power tools, medical devices and renewable-energy equipment.

Its complex in Fairhaven is 83,000 square feet, with administrative offices, research-and-development labs, clean-room operations and production lines. And the labs are especially important, Jason Galary, director of research and development, said in a company video. That’s where unique synergy happens between Nye engineers and the clients’ engineers.

“What differentiates us is ... our approach to working directly with our customers to simulate their applications ... and to be there during the whole design process to help them solve their problems,” he said.

The company works alongside its clients, but it also looks ahead.

Nye is a leader in emerging technologies, said Torsten Brieger, strategic marketing manager, calling its integration of industrial internet of things a perfect example. IIOT collects data in manufacturing equipment that can be used to make improvements.

“It sees the data on the manufacturing processes and involves machine learning,” Brieger said. “We can be getting updates to our phones on processes, mix times, cool times. Basically, right after something happens, there is an instant notification for that kettle” and its status, he said.

Optimization is the goal, according to Kathleen Landers, marketing supervisor.

“We are trying to continually improve and practice lean processes,” including waste reduction and time efficiencies, with IIOT allowing new insight and consistent outcomes, she said.

New insight is a base for the innovation for which Nye is known.

The company owns one of only five Spiral Orbit Tribometer testers in the world; the others are owned by NASA. The tribometer allows the company to simulate high-vacuum conditions such as those present in space to best examine how its products would perform in that environment.

In addition to partnerships with NASA, Nye has worked with major aerospace companies such as Northrop Grumman and Lockheed Martin, as well as the intergovernmental European Space Agency.

Nye has ISO certifications for the aerospace, automotive and medical industries. It is on the Department of Defense’s Qualified Provider

List for its specialty grease used to maintain U.S. Navy jets. At the same time, its lubrication products are in commonplace items: power drills, washing machines and cellphones, for example.

Along with many of its customers, Nye has cut its overall environmental impact, especially over the past decade.

Volatile organic compound levels have been reduced, according to Nye. One of the ways it works to reduce its carbon footprint is by recycling lubrications that don’t meet specifications – selling it to manufacturers of general-purpose grease, for example – and using as few hazardous materials as possible.

Environmental stewardship, and close customer collaboration breed success for Nye.

“The entire thing is a partnership,” Landers said. “We speak their language.” ■

‘Our products are technologies that **help make [customers’] products work better.**’

GEORGE MOCK, Nye Lubricants president and CEO





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FOOD INSPECTORS:
Employee Maria Velez, left, and CEO Navyn Salem check food packages as they move along the production line at the Edesia plant in North Kingstown. PBN PHOTO/RUPERT WHITELEY

Ready-to-eat remedy for world's neediest

BY NANCY KIRSCH | Contributing Writer

PRODUCING PEANUT-BASED, ready-to-use foods that help treat different degrees of malnutrition experienced by pregnant women and young children in Yemen, Afghanistan, Venezuela and elsewhere is the norm at North Kingstown-based **Edesia Inc.**

"We're constantly working in whatever countries seem to be in the worst condition possible," said Navyn Salem, founder and CEO. She also calls herself the non-profit company's "chief storyteller."

Salem said Edesia's 100 employees are fully invested in the mission to treat and prevent malnutrition in the world's most vulnerable populations. "Many people have lived where humanitarian aid was a lifeline and now they work here to provide it," Salem said. "That's a pretty powerful circle of life."

Since its founding in 2009, Edesia – named after the Roman goddess of food – has reached 8.5 million children in more than 50 countries. Salem is aiming to serve 10 million children by 2020. Humanitarian organizations such as UNICEF, World Food Program, U.S. Agency for International Development and the U.S. Department of Agriculture purchase most of Edesia's products, and then deliver them for free to participating public-health programs in needy countries. Much of the rest of Edesia's output is shipped by the company to smaller nonprofits and clinics, Salem said.

Edesia said its obsessive search for efficiencies and economies of scale, coupled with a focus on improvements, distinguishes the company. "We're given a lot of liberty to try new things," said Ron Yanku, plant operations director. "If we think of a new idea and implement it, that'll save lives. With backing from the top down, we're unstoppable."

The North Kingstown plant is heavily automated, unlike Edesia's original location in Providence, which had no automation. Employees who once spent hour after hour folding, filling and taping boxes for shipping

now operate sophisticated equipment that does the job.

The North Kingstown plant is five times the size and has twice the capacity of the original location. Each day, Edesia receives 150,000 pounds of raw materials – peanuts, vegetable oil, milk powder – which it transforms into 20,000 metric tons of products annually.

"The amount we have scaled up ... is pretty unbelievable," Salem said. "We will make in a month what we made in our whole first year."

With Edesia already meeting the plant's output goals, Yanku is looking for ways to do more in the same space. "The answer to that is almost always lean operations, automation and ingenuity," he said.

Edesia saw its revenue increase to \$38.3 million in 2017 from \$21.3 million in 2016. While the numbers dipped in 2018 to \$36.5 million, the company reported that revenue would have been \$39 million had USAID shipments not been delayed due to circumstances beyond Edesia's control.

Meanwhile, a donation of more than \$600,000 by Alex and Ani LLC paid for a new production line that boosted Edesia's capacity by one-third. Other Rhode Island businesses, including Collette Travel Services Inc. and Lifespan Corp., have made smaller donations.

Edesia is launching a new product line, MeWe, that is aimed at the domestic market. The line's first product is MeWe Baby, a peanut-based product designed to meet federal

guidelines recommending that babies consume 2 grams of peanut protein three times a week to reduce their risk of developing peanut allergies. With peanut butter a choking hazard, Salem's team developed MeWe Baby to help parents easily follow these guidelines, which the American Academy of Pediatrics has endorsed.

Three flavors of MeWe Baby will be sold soon in Dave's Marketplace, Stop & Shop and through Amazon.com. Other MeWe products – called "top secret" by Salem – should roll out this summer. Proceeds from the sale of the commercial products will be used to support Edesia's humanitarian work, the company said. ■

'If we think of a new idea and implement it, that'll save lives. **With backing from the top down, we're unstoppable.**

RON YANKU,
Edesia plant operations director



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The secrets to our success are many, but one of the greatest assets we have is our people. Out of 600 employees, 550 of them live in Rhode Island. That means, quite simply, that this is our home and we have a stake in making sure, day in and day out, that we are successful for ourselves and for our families. We are proud to call Rhode Island home and to stand tall with one another, and with all the partners in business, government, and education who also contribute to our success.”

- MICHAEL BRANDMEIER, PRESIDENT AND CEO

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TABLE TALK: From left, Jade Manufacturing President Don Boyle discusses a component with Quality Manager Ron Olf, Assembly Manager Donald Campbell, Vice President Chris Burch and Director of Manufacturing Steve Gruner.
PBN PHOTO/RUPERT WHITELEY

For Jade, precision is mission critical

BY NANCY KIRSCH | Contributing Writer

SPECIALIZING IN “BUILD-TO-PRINT” mechanical assemblies and precision components for radar and reconnaissance systems, family-owned **Jade Manufacturing Co.** is reaping lots of recognition.

The Warwick company is a seven-time winner of the Operational Excellence Supplier award from Raytheon Co., one of Jade’s most significant customers. Jade President Don Boyle was named the Manufacturer of the Year in 2018 by the U.S. Small Business Administration.

Even with those accolades and a backlog of work in the pipeline, Jade is looking to evaluate new business markets and to identify opportunities for improvement. Participating in Polaris MEP’s Manufacturing Innovation Challenge and working with Bryant University, the SBA, Rhode Island Manufacturers Association and the Southeastern New England Defense Industry Alliance, among others, has been invaluable, according to Boyle.

“There’s a lot going on for small manufacturers like us who want to take advantage of it, and we’ve received funding on some of these projects from the state,” Boyle said.

Jade’s 2018 strategic plan, which evolved from some of these collaborations, pinpoints several opportunities in commercial and military markets: satellites, autonomous underwater vehicles, drones, aerospace, energy storage, railroad signaling systems and uninterrupted power-supply systems.

With a commitment to ensuring its quality-control systems are up to date and first-rate, Jade is pursuing AS9100 quality certification, a massive, yearlong undertaking that involves upgrading and revamping the entire quality-management system. “We’re trying to keep ahead and be prepared ... to jump into the next big [opportunity],” Jade Vice President Chris Burch said. The company will maintain certification for both AS9100 and its existing ISO 9001:2015.

The new AS9100 certification – expected by

year’s end – will give Jade a competitive edge, especially in producing components for defense contractors, said Boyle, a son of company founder Arthur Boyle. “There’s a huge opportunity in military business ... we don’t see it slowing down for a very long time,” he said. “We’re booked up and now making decisions about where we want to be. We’re in a great position.”

Jade “takes a lot of pride in doing things right,” Boyle said. “We want to support the [military] fighters out there. It permeates everything we do.”

That attitude is put to the test. Jade ships more than 1,400 products with more than 200,000 individual components every year, while maintaining a 98.1 percent quality rating and 98.6 percent on-time delivery to Raytheon, even as it must respond to frequent product specification changes made by the federal government and the company’s customers.

“There’s a lot to manage in terms of updating specifications; it’s a constant thing we’re working on,” said Burch, Don Boyle’s son-in-law. “[Many] different government institutions notify us when changes are made and we work closely with Raytheon. [There’s a] constant flow of communication back and forth.”

“Our ability to stay with the specifications and find sources that give us material or process applications to meet the [changing] specifications, that distinguishes us from a lot of other manufacturers,” Boyle said. “That’s what makes us very different from a commer-

cial operation ... which wouldn’t have as many specifications.”

Asked to identify examples of Jade products, Burch said, “We can make anything from a screw assembly to a door frame; we make passive components for radar systems and a lot of work for Patriot missile systems, both legacy and up-and-coming [programs].” Calling Jade a “one-stop shop,” he added, “We’re not afraid to try anything once. We don’t turn work away and we figure it out.”

Burch and Boyle attributed the company’s ability to meet customer expectations to these factors: A sophisticated quality-control system, lean-manufacturing principles, close affiliations with their suppliers, many of them Rhode Island-based, and a highly skilled pool of about 20 cross-trained employees, many of whom have worked for Jade for decades.

The diligence has paid off. The company said it has increased revenue 5 percent each of the past five years. ■

‘We want to support the [military] fighters out there. **It permeates everything we do.**’

DON BOYLE,
Jade Manufacturing president

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SHIP IT: Supply Chain Manager Daphne Johnstad and Supply Chain Director David Seaback, center, check in with Shipping Manager Peter Reynolds at Amgen Rhode Island's West Greenwich facility.
PBN PHOTO/RUPERT WHITELEY

Amgen finds antidote for exporting obstacles

BY NANCY KIRSCH | Contributing Writer

WHILE AMGEN INC.'S RHODE ISLAND OPERATION usually ships most of its biologic products to the drug manufacturer's processing plant in Puerto Rico, international shipments have grown steadily in recent years, creating new challenges for Amgen.

As **Amgen Rhode Island's** product mix – the active ingredients for myriad Amgen pharmaceuticals – and its volume have increased, the company has needed to export more products for drug finishing and filling at locations in Ireland, Germany, Italy and Japan.

"Amgen Rhode Island exports have increased from 26 percent of actual shipments in 2017 to 33 percent in 2018," said Supply Chain Director David Seaback. "We expect to see a continuing trend upwards over the next several years."

More exports bring complications, which Amgen said it has worked hard to overcome.

Under traditional procedures in which Transportation Security Administration officials open and inspect every shipment, Amgen's highly regulated, pristine and frozen biologics face the risks of contamination, deterioration and delays.

Instead, with support and training from the TSA, Amgen Rhode Island soon will become a certified cargo-screening facility. As a result, products from West Greenwich "will move through the supply chain with reduced lead times at greater ease," Seaback said. "We [will] have six Amgen employees complete the TSA certification ... who will monitor the packing and sealing of products in an area within the facility that will be cordoned off."

Currently transporting products by air and by sea, Amgen Rhode Island is redirecting more of its shipments to sea routes because it's most cost-effective. Such a move sets Amgen apart from its competition in the frozen biologic-products market, Seaback said, adding that products and bulk shipments are subject to sophisticated temperature controls and validations throughout the distribution process.

Amgen's 75-acre West Greenwich campus, where the company has invested \$1.5 billion,

manufactures Enbrel and several other commercial products.

In 2018, Amgen Rhode Island produced nearly 2 metric tons of products at a 100 percent production-lot success rate across 11 products, according to Thomas Seewoester, site vice president of operations.

Through lean manufacturing, productivity in shipping/receiving and in raw material sampling improved by 19 percent and 63 percent, respectively, from 2017 to 2018. Last year, Amgen Rhode Island – one of more than 60 Amgen facilities worldwide – earned Amgen's best-plant award for the fourth time since 2007. "The process is driven by very hard metrics that we must meet ... safety, productivity, defects," said Seewoester. "The competition for the best-plant award is very stiff."

Amgen, based in Thousand Oaks, Calif., had annual revenue of \$22.8 billion companywide and incurred \$3.6 billion in research-and-development expenses in 2017, the latest year for which such data is available. For the fifth year, Amgen was named in 2018 to the Dow Jones Sustainability World Index, which measures environmental, social and governance criteria, with a focus on long-term shareholder value.

The West Greenwich facility is constructing a next-generation biomanufacturing plant. At about 120,000 square feet, the plant will be built in half the traditional construction time at about 25 percent and 50 percent of a traditional plant's capital cost and manufacturing cost, respectively. It's also expected to use less water and energy and produce fewer carbon emis-

sions. Amgen projects that it will add 150 skilled employees.

Recruiting individuals with undergraduate or master's degrees, Amgen Rhode Island often hires people who served internships.

Building close ties with Brown and Bryant universities, the University of Rhode Island and Worcester Polytechnic Institute has been crucial in finding talent, Seewoester said.

The company is also trying to reach younger students, too.

The Amgen Biotech Experience, through which Amgen employees bring professional-grade equipment to Rhode Island high schools, inspires students who "never thought how engaging science could be," said Tara Urban, Amgen senior manager of corporate affairs. ■

'Amgen Rhode Island exports have increased from 26 percent of actual shipments in 2017 to 33 percent in 2018.'

DAVID SEABACK,
Amgen Rhode Island
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BY DESIGN: Printer Tom Willis, left, shows freshly printed graphics to NFI President Renaud Megard, center, and Manufacturing Director Mark Smith.

PNB PHOTO/RUPERT WHITELEY

Sustainability is part of NFI's designs

BY MICHAEL HARDMAN | Contributing Writer

NAMEPLATES FOR INDUSTRY CORP.'S products have been shot into space, put into submarines and can be seen on buildings, homes and offices around the world.

In its 43 years, the New Bedford company has been able to transform from a screen-printing operation based in England to a global leader in high-performing printed graphics. The company built the New Bedford location in 1988 after expanding from England.

"Our sales rep saw the demand in the United States," said Mark Smith, the manufacturing director. "Very early on, we started digital printing [and] we were able to stay on top of the technology."

The 48-person company now specializes in digital printing with its in-house design studio, while offering high-performing graphics. NFI produces labels, decals, stickers, tags, nameplates, faceplates, overlays and membrane switches.

Their customers around the globe are in sectors such as medical, industrial manufacturing, government, military, professional services, technology and communications, transportation and equipment.

"We work with small companies and big companies," said Smith. "We spread it around."

Still, NFI is not resting on its laurels.

The company has put a lot of focus on environmental sustainability.

NFI has eliminated 99.5 percent of the solvent-based inks and cleaning solutions it once used in production. And 99 percent of all the chemicals used at NFI are considered environmentally friendly, the company said. And, of course, NFI ensures that plastic, metal and paper are separated from its waste stream and recycled. That amounts to 55 barrels a week in plastic alone.

Improvements are coming in other areas of the business, too.

As part of its manufacturing process, NFI

has educated managers and employees in lean manufacturing, allowing the company to reduce lead times from 12 days to five, and shifts from two to one. Products can be delivered to customers in half the time it used to take.

Smith said increased use of robotics is on NFI's horizon in order to free employees for more interaction with clients.

"We may not be interacting with the customer," said Smith, whose clients can use a portal to make their request. "We have [looked] at robotics for the more repetitive tasks."

While technology might change some of the manufacturing processes, employees will continue to play a key role. NFI has emphasized training and retaining its staff, and has implemented a "3 by 3" policy in which each employee is cross-trained to do three different jobs.

NFI uses this plan to allow employees to look at the different areas and see what works best for them. It also allows the company to fill various manufacturing assignments needed for certain projects. "They are able to transfer around to make sure every job is done," Smith said.

For high school graduates, the Corridor to College program allows them to choose from three different career paths, focusing on engineering/design, production management and business management, with job training and educational opportunities.

NFI uses the training programs to teach

employees various parts of the business, from marketing and sales, to see how the designers and engineers develop the projects. Also, this allows new employees to learn from longtime employees.

"We have people who have been here 20, 25 to 30 years," said Smith. "They have a lot of tribal knowledge."

The company has taken numerous actions to make sure their employees stay safe. A safety committee meets monthly, while the management team audits the results, and employees who avoid potential work hazards are recognized and rewarded. Employees are also provided with safety glasses and gloves in all production areas.

The initiatives have paid off.

NFI said its total recordable injury rate is zero, while on-time delivery rates are at 99 percent, and defect rates had fallen to 0.7 percent from 3 percent. ■

"Very early on, we started digital printing [and] **we were able to stay on top of the technology.**"

MARK SMITH, Nameplates for Industry manufacturing director



*RIMA and its Advisory Council
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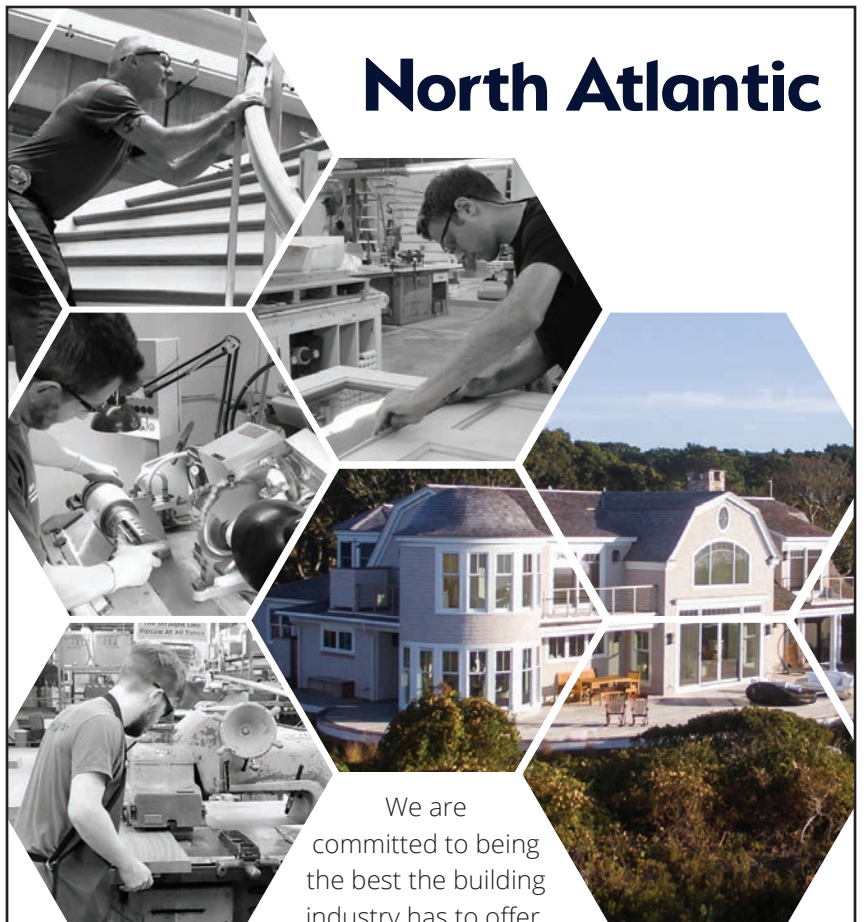
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ALL ABOARD: Mechanic Jose Duarte, left, consults a board that's integral to International Packaging's lean protocols. With him, from left, are Lucy Amaral, production manager; James Kilmartin, purchasing manager; and Erin Kilmartin, marketing and creative director.

PBN PHOTO/RUPERT WHITELEY

Interpak invites others on its 'lean journey'

BY WENDY PIERMAN MITZEL | Contributing Writer

"BEING 'LEAN' HAS CHANGED how we manufacture our products and how we act as a company," said Erin Kilmartin, marketing and creative director at **International Packaging Corp.**, better known as Interpak. "On the practical side, we have built an in-house training center where we educate all employees on lean tools and processes, as well as other employee skills. Culturally, lean thinking has changed Interpak by transferring mental models into the company."

Kilmartin is part of the family that operates Interpak, a third-generation, custom manufacturer and distributor of boxes, point-of-purchase displays, and accessories for manufacturers and retailers throughout the United States. Started in 1957 by Jack and Jerry Kilmartin, Interpak has continued growing through a "lean journey" started by Jack's son John Kilmartin, when he took over in the 1990s.

"Lean is beneficial because it limits excess inventory, the need for expediting, and wasteful activities," said John Kilmartin, Interpak president. "However, lean is not just about attacking waste and increasing the speed of production. Rather, lean is focused on improving the quality of products and services, as well as the stability of our processes. Lean is also beneficial because it improves employee engagement, morale and safety, and reduces operating costs."

Following lean protocols has improved processes. Defects and inventory have been reduced, moving components, materials and products have changed or been eliminated, items are manufactured as they are needed and efficiencies in work methods have increased productivity.

Interpak employs more than 225 people. Its corporate office and largest manufacturing facility is in Pawtucket, and there's a factory and warehouse in Scotland and a quality-control office in Shenzhen, China. Its customers include manufacturers and retailers in the jewelry, gift, candy, cookie and coin markets, such as Tif-

fany, Alex and Ani LLC, Kohl's, U.S. Mint and Net-A-Porter.

Producing 2 million boxes a month in Pawtucket, the "made-to-order" aspect of the products requires a high level of coordination among sales department, subcomponent manufacturing departments, assembly departments, and warehousing and shipping departments.

Going lean was the way of the future, Interpak said.

The fundamental approach behind these continuous improvement efforts is the principle of PDCA (plan, do, check, act or adjust), said John Kilmartin. Interpak uses methods, many of them visual cues, such as on lights at assembly cells and status boards to communicate hour-to-hour production and quality levels and gaps.

"Pain" boards communicate big and small irritations and flow problems. Company standards are shared via schedule boards, shadow boards and pictorial work-center communications.

At any given time, Interpak uses improvement tools such as Kaizen events (targeted strategy meetings) and Gemba walk-throughs by management to observe processes and procedures.

Collaborating with other businesses in the community is another part of Interpak's lean journey.

"First, for us to perform at our highest we have begun encouraging our vendors and collaborators to incorporate lean philosophies into their culture," John Kilmartin said. "We have

hosted many companies in Rhode Island at our facility for them to learn from us and enhance their manufacturing and business process to be lean. This helps us by allowing our systems to work better, as well as improving our vendors, allowing us to all do better. Second, our goal as a company is to be a sustaining resource for our vendors. Every day is a different collaboration with them, many of whom are local. Whether it is helping to forecast their packaging needs, designing a new product and even help running their business, we are there for them. We participate in many HR, sales, CEO and marketing groups that allow us to collaborate with other companies in the region, as we can all grow together." ■

'Lean is focused on improving the quality of products and services, as well as the stability of our processes.'

JOHN KILMARTIN, Interpak president





CHECKING IN: Plant Manager Craig Danko, left, and Production Manager Joe Cairo, right, review safety checklists with Michael Simpson, a setup machinist, at Saint-Gobain in Bristol. PBN PHOTO/RUPERT WHITELEY

Where playing it safe is serious business

BY WENDY PIERMAN MITZEL | Contributing Writer

AT SAINT-GOBAIN SA, safety starts on day one.

“Our safety-first culture is fueled by preparation,” explained Craig Danko, Saint-Gobain plant manager. “We expect that at the end of the day, all employees will have taken the initiative to make the future safer while they were at work and return home in the same manner in which they arrived. With this in mind, it is important to invest the time to properly train employees before they are put in the manufacturing environment.

The Bristol location for the multinational manufacturer produces critical parts and components from high-performance polymer materials for the automotive, aerospace and electronics markets. Processes include polymerization, injection molding, compression molding and computer numerically controlled machining. There are nearly 50 employees in Bristol, and managers know everyone plays a part in creating a safe environment.

“We engage in observational coaching to help ensure that all guidelines are adhered to and that the employee has mastered the protocol. We do this all throughout an employee’s tenure. This helps to reinforce and confirm that our safety policies and procedures are followed by all employees all of the time,” Danko said.

A detailed checklist allows for review of the key safety steps that are required to successfully complete routine tasks. For example, for working at heights, employees must inspect all equipment, including lifts and ladders, as well as the safety gear. They also need to properly mark off their work area to ensure no one passes beneath.

“To us, ‘successfully’ means without injury,” Danko said. “We review the checklist before an employee is permitted to engage in any of these activities. Then a trained employee will walk through the checklist side by side with the employee who is completing the task to make sure that all safety procedures are being followed.”

An environmental health and safety

program, driven by employee engagement, incentivizes employees, said Mark Collette, global environment, health and safety director. Employees earn points for participation in a wide range of safety-related activities, such as conducting a safety observation, reporting and correcting an unsafe condition, completing required inspections and mentoring newer employees. Saint-Gobain lists 2018 participation at 97 percent for employees in Bristol.

“By participating in these activities, the employees become naturally more responsible for their own safety and the safety at the site. The accumulation of points positively impacts our incentive program,” Collette said.

As a result of these and other programs at the Bristol site, leaders said safety performance has continued to strengthen. They cite zero lost time to injuries in more than 11 years and zero Occupational Safety and Health Administration recordable injuries in three years. Unsafe conditions are assessed and addressed in less than 60 days, 94 percent of the time. The Bristol facility earned an “A” grade from Saint-Gobain corporate during a biannual EHS audit in 2017 and was named a 2018 Emerald Award for Excellence in EHS by Saint-Gobain North America.

“Our site has an EHS committee that consists of managers, engineers, maintenance workers and shop-floor employees,” Collette said. “This diverse representation helps us garner insight from a range of roles and perspec-

‘Our goal is to empower employees and encourage them to contribute to the solution.’

MARK COLLETTE,
Saint-Gobain global environment,
health and safety director

tives. The team meets regularly to discuss risks that have been identified and works together to find solutions. We are also proactive in nature, and strive to get in front of any potential challenges. Our goal is to empower employees and encourage them to contribute to the solution. When employees help solve issues themselves, buy-in becomes a much easier task.”

A new incident-investigation program called Cause Mapping has added to the success, said Danko. Its use led to 100 percent effectiveness of corrective actions put in place (no repeat occurrences) in 2018.

“The process involves continually asking questions to identify causes of each effect and drilling down to the most critical, and often hard to discover, details,” he explained. “It’s a tool to drive open-ended questions and honest conversations to reveal facts, while taking potential biases out of the investigation.” ■





MINDING THE STORAGE: Steve Lorello, left, account manager, discusses logistics with warehouse associate Donald Roderick, center, and Gordon Fox, team leader, at Dean Warehouse Services.

PBN PHOTO/RUPERT WHITELEY

Maintaining an impeccable track record

BY SARAH PARSONS | Contributing Writer

DEAN WAREHOUSE SERVICES INC. is a family business, but it operates at the level of a much larger supply-chain management firm.

The 39-year-old company provides third-party logistics support to entities around the country, including warehousing, fulfillment and distribution services. It's grown 20-25 percent every year for the past few years while maintaining long-term clients in the face of increasing competition. Several of those clients are Fortune 500 companies, said Brad S. Dean, the company's CEO.

Part of the reason clients choose Cumberland-based Dean is its sophisticated technology. The company invested in a multimillion-dollar warehouse inventory management platform called Synapse. Initially developed for OHL, a multibillion-dollar construction and civil engineering company, Dean Warehouse Services adopted the technology to track goods from around the world in near-real time as they're brought into its warehouses, stored and then shipped. The internet-based platform allows clients to run reports, check order statuses and see exactly where their inventory is located at any given moment, 24 hours a day and seven days a week.

"They have complete visibility, as if that facility was in their backyard – even if it's 3,000 miles away in California," said Joe Iovini, Dean president.

The Synapse platform is multifaceted, supporting the vast range of Dean's clients, from consumer-product companies to major importers and manufacturers. "An entity like us, if we have 100 clients, we have 100 companies under our roof," Iovini said. "And they're all different."

Dean maintains an in-house information technology staff to oversee the Synapse platform and support clients. Every client has specific operating procedures for their products, depending on the retailers they work with. That means that every client has specific instructions for things such as how boxes are

labeled or how shipments are prepared. In-house IT support ensures that operations run smoothly and that clients don't get fined for failing to adhere to retailers' vendor and routing guidelines. The arrangement ultimately helps clients save money and stress.

But it isn't just the technology that draws companies to Dean. The supply-chain manager prides itself on pairing state-of-the-art technology with family values. "We're a family business and we run it that way," Dean said.

His father, Chairman Brad A. Dean, founded the company nearly 40 years ago after working in transportation. He got the idea to start Dean Warehouse Services after one of his transportation clients inquired about finding warehouse facilities to store his goods.

Rather than offering fixed-pricing packages, as some companies do, Dean Warehouse Services works with clients individually to understand their needs. They work with mom-and-pop shops that may only do a relatively small volume of orders every year and bigger companies that supply behemoth retailers such as Walmart. Each client gets the personalized Dean Warehouse Services touch.

"We find clients resist the traditional red tape of dealing with big companies," Iovini said. "You call a large company, you get 48 voicemails. Our clients love the value-added, personalized services and support."

It also helps that Dean Warehouse Services has facilities on both the East and West coasts.

The company boasts more than 2 million square feet of space spread across Cranston, Warwick and Hopkinton, and Ontario and San Bernardino, Calif. All facilities are equipped with security features, such as video surveillance.

Servicing both coasts allows Dean to stay competitive by helping clients save time and money on shipping and transport. "If you can get goods into the U.S. market at the closest point possible, the sooner you can sell," Iovini said. "Having an East and West coast footprint allows customers to split the country in half and put inventory to left and to the right, thereby reducing inland transportation costs." ■

'You call a large company, you get 48 voicemails. **Our clients love the value-added, personalized services and support.**

JOE IOVINI,
Dean Warehouse Services president



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PROTECTIVE PRODUCT: Amerisewn President John Caito, left, stands next to a model wearing protective clothing made in a joint project with Concordia Fibers and Goodwin-Bradley Pattern Co. From right is Kevin Leandro, Concordia product development manager; Al Hollenbeck, Concordia CEO; and Layne Mayer, Amerisewn director of strategic growth.
PBN PHOTO/RUPERT WHITELEY

A seamless ability to join forces

BY SUSAN SHALHOUB | Contributing Writer

CRANSTON-BASED Amerisewn has collaboration woven through its corporate structure – working with customers, other Ocean State manufacturers and its employees to yield the best results for all. A recent success came about after the company worked closely with one of its customers, listening and responding with a custom solution.

The stitched-product division of Rhode Island-based Desmark Industries, Amerisewn designs and makes protective clothing – such as riot gear – for the military, law enforcement and corrections fields. One of its latest products caters to those working in the mental health industry.

The Ukeru brand of protective body pads for those working with potentially violent people in mental health facilities was the result of the Virginia-based Grafton Integrated Health Network's need for threat-specific pads that protect both patient and worker.

"This was us collaborating with a customer, Grafton," said Layne Mayer, director of Amerisewn's strategic growth. "They do the marketing, but it's up to us to solve their problems. We develop a product and they test it out and send it back and make changes. It's an ongoing dialogue."

Previously, Mayer said, mental health workers were using a "mishmash of sporting goods" as protective devices, which were often heavy and not designed for institutional environments.

The Ukeru line now has seven products, each customized for a certain environment, threat and patient type. The products are used in 23 states. "The pads have dramatically reduced injury, workers' compensation policy costs and employee turnover, for a total return on investment of [more than] \$16 million, as tracked by Grafton," according to a statement by Amerisewn.

When it needs help in creating top-quality protective gear that meets its high standards, the company doesn't stop trying. Instead, it reaches out.

Amerisewn ran into some roadblocks in

creating a stab-resistant riot suit, for example, unable to find the correct materials it needed.

It contacted Goodwin-Bradley Pattern Co. in Providence, which suggested that Concordia Fibers in Coventry, another manufacturer, also join the conversation. Now, the molded panels for a stab-resistant riot suit and prototype components are being developed by Goodwin-Bradley, with Concordia making the fiber component; Amerisewn is developing the specifications and end use.

"We all look at it together, keep price and performance where they need to be, as well as weight and manufacturability," said Mayer. "It becomes team-thinking."

The collaborative project with Concordia and Goodwin-Bradley is in the research-and-development phase, as is a project Amerisewn is working on with Cranston's Mearthane Products Corp.

Mayer said the collaboration with Mearthane came about when another company that makes a component Amerisewn uses in its products – a specialized, moldable urethane foam – decided to move its manufacturing overseas. The company had difficulty finding a United States supplier. It began talking with Mearthane, which is now working on the foam in tandem with Amerisewn.

"We connect as much as we can with companies in the state," said Mayer. "When we need something, we start in Rhode Island. We

definitely believe in getting Rhode Island companies to work together; there is camaraderie in that."

The company is also doing materials-research work with the University of Rhode Island.

Amerisewn believes in being part of the manufacturing community, active in groups such as the Rhode Island Manufacturers Association, and taking advantage of resources such as the Small Business Development Center and Governor's Workforce Board training grants.

The number of employees at the company has doubled over the past two years since it rebranded as Amerisewn, said Mayer. The company's sense of camaraderie and collaboration is also a facet of its internal operations.

"The factory workers, especially, are a definite community," she said. Company employees contribute to problem-solving, continuous-improvement efforts and even recruiting. "When we hire, people bring in cousins or friends [to apply] if they have someone they know who is willing to learn and be in a collaborative work environment," said Mayer. ■

'We connect as much as we can with companies in the state.'

LAYNE MAYER,
Amerisewn director of strategic growth

AMERI//SEWN



MIX IT UP: Chi Foods CEO Minnie Luong stirs the ingredients for a fresh batch of kimchi in the company's kitchen.

PBN PHOTO/
RUPERT WHITELEY

Acquiring a taste for entrepreneurship

BY MICHAEL HARDMAN | Contributing Writer

MINNIE LUONG WAS LIVING in a Cambridge, Mass., apartment a few years ago when she decided to attempt to make kimchi. She had grown up eating the Korean culinary staple and wanted to try to make her own version.

"It came out terrible and was a colossal waste of time," she said with a laugh. "It was heart-breaking."

Being the founder and CEO of an Asian-food business would have been a stretch to even think about back then. It would have been hard to believe her kimchi would become good enough to grace the shelves of local markets, major grocery chains and college cafeterias, but Luong now owns **Chi Foods LLC**, a growing business that is planning to expand into teaching and other areas.

Kimchi is traditionally a side dish made from salted and fermented vegetables, including napa cabbage and Korean radishes. The food goes through a long process of fermentation and is commonly stored in kimchi refrigerators. Providence-based Chi Foods makes Napa kimchi and vegan kimchi.

The dish has a long history in Asian culture. Minnie's father, Chinh, made kimchi in Vietnam before he fled to the U.S. with Minnie, who was 3 at the time.

"I don't remember much about it, and it was a traumatic experience," Luong said. "I have been back to Vietnam, and I love it there."

While kimchi is a Korean dish, it is very popular in Vietnam. During the Vietnam War, the president of South Korea asked President Lyndon Johnson to supply it to the Korean troops deployed there. While working as a chef at a technology company in Manhattan Beach, Calif., Luong put kimchi on the menu to give the workers a healthy option.

"I started serving it to my fellow employees so they wouldn't get sick, and I wouldn't get sick," she said with a laugh.

In 2015, Luong and her husband, Jeff, decided to move from California to Rhode Island, where her family lived, and shift the direction of their careers. Rhode Island's thriving food scene made starting a business attractive.

She said she decided to go into the kimchi business because of beneficial probiotics and flavor profiles. One of the company goals is to produce healthy Asian foods.

While going through the ups and downs of building a new company, Luong developed kimchi recipes, for which she uses locally grown products, selling jars of the kimchi at local food markets while raising money from family and friends. Chi Foods faced obstacles in creating the systems and operations needed to make high-quality products for its brand.

"There was a lot of testing going on," Luong said. "We had a refrigerator filled with kimchi."

Luong launched the business at Warren's culinary incubator Hope & Main, but within six months, Chi Foods needed a new location as it expanded.

Then her business got a big break. While Luong was attending an event in Providence, she met a Whole Foods employee who was on the hunt for new products. Before attending the event, she had rushed to make homemade labels for her jars. Six months later, Chi Foods' products were on Whole Foods' shelves.

"He commented about my labels," said Luong with a laugh. "It was a long process to get it into the store."

'I started serving [kimchi] to my fellow employees so they wouldn't get sick, and I wouldn't get sick.'

MINNIE LUONG, Chi Foods CEO

Her kimchi is now in more than 100 retail stores, restaurants and colleges in New England, including Rhode Island School of Design, Roger Williams University and the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth.

Last summer, while six months pregnant, Luong attended the Goldman Sachs 10,000 Small Businesses program, which allowed her to work on her business plan and raise more money for her company, which has five employees after three years in operation.

Chi Foods is currently working to expand its production facility to a research-and-design kitchen, which will be offering rental space to other food businesses. ■





SOUPED UP: From left, Courtney Blount Hamilton, receptionist; Rachael Blount Girard, food-service national accounts market manager; Myvette Sousa, executive assistant in corporate services; and Lisa Blount White, logistics accountant, show off some of the products made at Blount Fine Foods.

PBN PHOTO/RUPERT WHITELEY

The right ingredients for success

BY SUSAN SHALHOUB | Contributing Writer

FAMILIES ADAPT TO CHANGE, face challenges together and help others when they can.

A family business started in the 1880s, **Blount Fine Foods Corp.** does all these things with its family of foods – things that also make good business sense. It's a philosophy that has served the company well over five generations of the Blount family.

Todd Blount has been CEO since the early 2000s, when he took over the company from his father, Ted, who had taken the reins from his father, F. Nelson Blount. Todd's cousin Stephen Blount handles business development, focusing on restaurants; his cousin Rachael Blount Girard handles marketing. His sisters, Courtney Blount Hamilton and Lisa Blount White, work in reception and accounting, respectively.

Beginning as an oyster-packing company, Blount Fine Foods has gone through several incarnations to better provide what its customers want for retail stores, restaurants and household kitchens. The company now carries full lines of gourmet soups, side dishes, entrees, sauces and more.

Now based in Fall River, with production facilities in Warren and McKinney, Texas, Blount and its 400 employees know there is value in change. But those changes can come with challenges, which the Blount family addresses head on.

A challenge Blount addressed recently: improving its supply-chain system. Due to the nature of Blount's products, that's a bit trickier than it would be for other companies. Buying power is limited in the world of fresh organic-soup ingredients, which mainly come from small farms and don't have preservatives to extend shelf life, according to Todd Blount.

"Everything is perishable," he said. "If demand increases, or if the weather gets colder, we often can't get more raw material. Organic items are less flexible."

The company set out to improve supplier relations and ingredient quality, establish sup-

plier continuity plans and save on costs, among other goals. Blount also had to communicate to its vendors that it needs flexibility in ordering.

It established a 90-day inventory report for raw material, for example. "We immediately know if we have too much or too little with the 90-day report and are able to update vendors of that number for the next 90 days [so the company can say], 'Get us more or be ready to sell us more,'" Blount said.

Finding backup vendors and going farther to find suppliers also helped. If a vendor can provide only 80 percent of an order, a second vendor can make up the other 20 percent. Instead of getting all of its cranberries from farms on Cape Cod, Blount might buy some from Wisconsin farms now, if needed.

These and other new practices reduced expired raw-material waste by 50 percent last year, according to the company.

Supply-chain improvements are just one part of the company's continuous investment in speed, safety, efficiency and quality. It upgrades production and chilling technology regularly, ensuring that soup textures and ingredients are maintained. A new safety program reduced the company's equipment-related incidents by 12 percent in the past year.

At the same time, revenue has been on the rise, climbing \$22.5 million in 2018 to \$361 million.

As the Blount family works to maximize the company's effectiveness in getting its customer base what it wants in the most efficient way possible, it also contributes to the community.

Todd Blount leads a monthly forum for other

businesses in the Fall River Industrial Park, helping to create a "rising-tide effect," he said. A Greater Fall River Development Corp. executive committee member, he works on Bristol County, Mass., job-growth strategies and sits on a regional manufacturing CEO forum.

This year, the company and Bristol Community College are awarding collaborative workplace grants for lean-manufacturing training.

"Fall River has been very good to us. We feel it's kind of our duty" to help others advance their companies and skills as well, Blount said.

'Fall River has been very good to us. We feel it's kind of our duty [to help other businesses].'

TODD BLOUNT,
Blount Fine Foods CEO



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Response Technologies fueled by flexibility

BY WENDY PIERMAN MITZEL | Contributing Writer

WHEN DAVID PETTEY and Ed Bard founded **Response Technologies LLC** four years ago, they had enough industry experience to know they didn't have to go it alone.

They turned to startup experts with a plan for an additive manufacturing company that would use layered materials to "print" 3D flexible composites for use in such industries as defense, aerospace and automotive. The company's first product would be an explosion-resistant fuel tank.

First, they attended MassChallenge Boston, a startup accelerator that provides resources and opportunities for funding new ideas.

"MassChallenge Boston was of great value to Response Technologies," said Pettey, who is the CEO. "It provided phenomenal access to a network of seasoned entrepreneurs. What's more, we were connected to a team of advisers who were able to help us with our knowledge and experience gaps."

"Our 'cost-plus' backgrounds biased us toward making products cheaper, better and faster," Pettey said. "Our MassChallenge experience triggered a paradigm shift. We needed to create value for our customers' pain points. There is much greater value creation when solving customers' most painful problems. Disruptive innovation is faster and cheaper when customers and partners are able to evaluate minimal viable products."

Soon after, they were invited to attend the Sikorsky Innovations Entrepreneurial Challenge, along with 15 other companies from around the world. Response Technologies was awarded an honorable mention and continued working on one of Sikorsky Aircraft Corp.'s leading research and development programs.

Pettey and Bard didn't stop there. The two entered Response Technologies into the 2016 Rhode Island Business Plan Competition and won.

"While Sikorsky validated our technology, the RIBP competition validated our commercial path," Pettey said.

Entering these types of business competitions is a strategy that Pettey and Bard would strongly encourage other startups to pursue.

"The more often and more diverse the audience, the greater the value," Pettey said. "Time is a startup's greatest asset, or enemy. A 'no' is better than a 'maybe,' and failing fast gives a startup the potential runway to evolve. Living on 'maybe' can be a slow, painful and often permanent death."

Response Technologies' founding mission was to produce lower-cost, explosion-resistant fuel tanks for NASCAR, Formula One and other types of auto racing. With six employees, it now does much more, operating in a nearly 10,000-square-foot facility in East Providence with extensive analytical, engineering and manufacturing capabilities.

Response Technologies has remained profitable and experienced year-over-year revenue growth. According to Pettey, 2018's revenue was nearly 10 times greater than in 2015.

As the processes and products have evolved, Response Technologies' growing customer base now includes the federal Defense Logistics Agency, the U.S. Army and U.S. Navy, and Lockheed Martin Corp., the parent company of Sikorsky.

"Ed and I were both looking for something different to do," Pettey said. "We wanted to work within some of the same product spaces we had been in before, but we also needed to be able to differentiate our value from the well-established incumbents."

Pettey has a background in the textile science industry. Bard is a former Army officer with a background in chemical engineering and management.

"David and I were confident that our technology could solve a lot of industry problems," said Bard, who is the company president. "Initially, we pursued a handful of markets to understand what the customers valued most. Our initial deep traction was for helicopter explosion-resistant fuel tanks for the U.S. military. My prior military service may have assisted us in our communications with the military, and of course it has helped me personally as a leader, businessperson and citizen, but I think our solution's immense value was the key driver to our rapid progress."

As additive manufacturing continues to develop, the advances have allowed Response Technologies to keep its footprint small and maximize its use of materials. Pettey said that efficiency should only improve in the future.

"Our future state process is a single [additive manufacturing] configuration that will 'print' our products from start to finish," he said. ■

'Failing fast gives a startup the **potential runway to evolve.**'

DAVID PETTEY, Response Technologies co-founder and CEO



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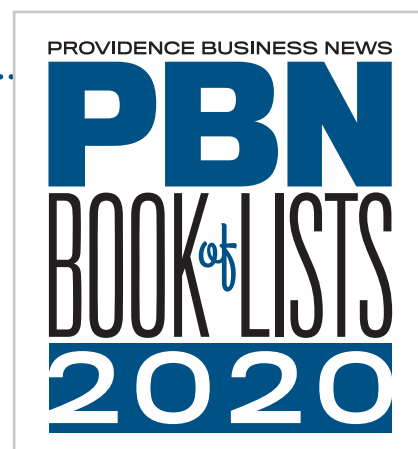
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IN SESSION: CEO and President Karl Wadensten, right, leads a meeting of employees at VIBCO. PBN PHOTO/RUPERT WHITELEY

VIBCO spurs its workers to stretch their limits

BY MICHAEL HARDMAN | Contributing Writer

THERE AREN'T TOO MANY COMPANIES that can claim their products have been to the moon, but **VIBCO Inc.**, which produces industrial, transportation and construction vibrators, can.

“Just think, a little company from Wyoming, R.I., went to the moon,” said Karl Wadensten, president and CEO of Richmond-based VIBCO. One of the company’s vibrators was carried on the Apollo lunar module, and it’s still there on the moon. “There were a lot of things left behind,” he said.

In order to survive in the manufacturing business for more than half a century, a company has to be able to adapt, innovate and reinvent its products. That’s a constant theme through VIBCO’s history.

Ted Wadensten, the company founder, patented VIBCO’s first Silent Pneumatic Turbine Vibrator in the 1970s. The company now has 46 patents to its credit. VIBCO began in Lodi, N.J., in 1962 with a line of manufactured vibration products for material flow. VIBCO first offered electrical vibrators, and later added pneumatic ball vibrators.

“He’s 89 and still comes into the office part time,” Karl Wadensten said of the company founder, who also is his father.

VIBCO’s vibrators are used in a multitude of industries, including construction, agriculture, food processing, brewing, transportation, manufacturing and pharmaceutical.

VIBCO recently developed two new products. Stik-It allows vibrators to be mounted to smooth, nonporous surfaces in seconds by creating a positive suction with no welding or bolting, according to the company. The Rail Boss Positive Locking Vibrator speeds up railcar loading and unloading by using an inflatable airbag to allow more vibration to transfer to the car. It removes coarse sand, stone, asphalt, powdery flour and cement, increasing the life span of the vibrator and decreasing safety risks.

With more than 360,000 customers world-

wide, VIBCO never has a shortage of challenges that need to be solved, and that’s where its innovative nature comes in.

“We’re like Burger King; you can have it your way,” Wadensten said. “We listen to the voices [of the customers] and that’s been the key for us.”

VIBCO’s products have been used in the construction of the Freedom Tower in New York City, the new Tappan Zee Bridge over the Hudson River, Gillette Stadium, Fenway Park, Marlins Park in Miami, the Flight 93 National Memorial in Shanksville, Pa., and the National World War II Memorial in Washington, D.C.

VIBCO has been practicing lean manufacturing for nearly 20 years, implementing it after a customer needed an immediate delivery to save a building project. That forced VIBCO to examine how it was meeting the demands of its customers.

In addition to adapting to changes in the industry, the company has emphasized maintaining and improving the health and morale of its employees.

Each morning, the workers participate in 10-minute stretching sessions, followed by Kaizen Blitz, which includes training, then analysis and a possible rearrangement of production areas. According to the company, the programs have improved employee health, lowered injuries, reduced health care costs and opened up a forum for discussing ideas and daily planning.

“You have to build your people,” Wadensten said. “We need really smart people to develop [the products] and we want them to be exceptional.”

VIBCO provides a mentoring program for employees interested in learning more about the business. The company also selects various employees for training, courses, events, keynote talks and certifications, including Lean 101 Training. VIBCO is open about its operation, allowing people into its facility for tours.

New employees are given an online assessment test – Clifton’s Strengths Finder – which identifies what the employees do well naturally and customizes a program to allow them to do their best. VIBCO extends its employee training to its interns through the Engineering Capstone projects with New England universities. ■

‘We need really smart people to develop [the products] and we want them to be exceptional.’

KARL WADENSTEN,
VIBCO president and CEO

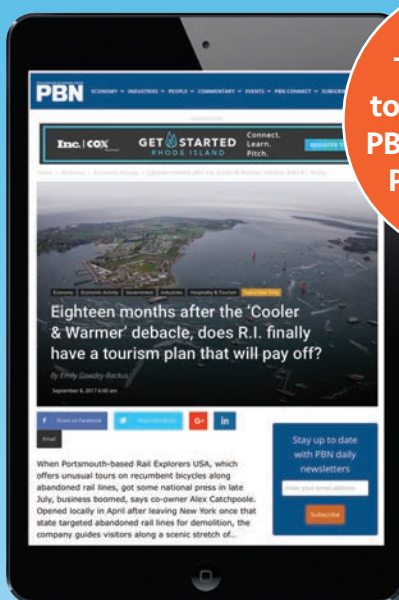
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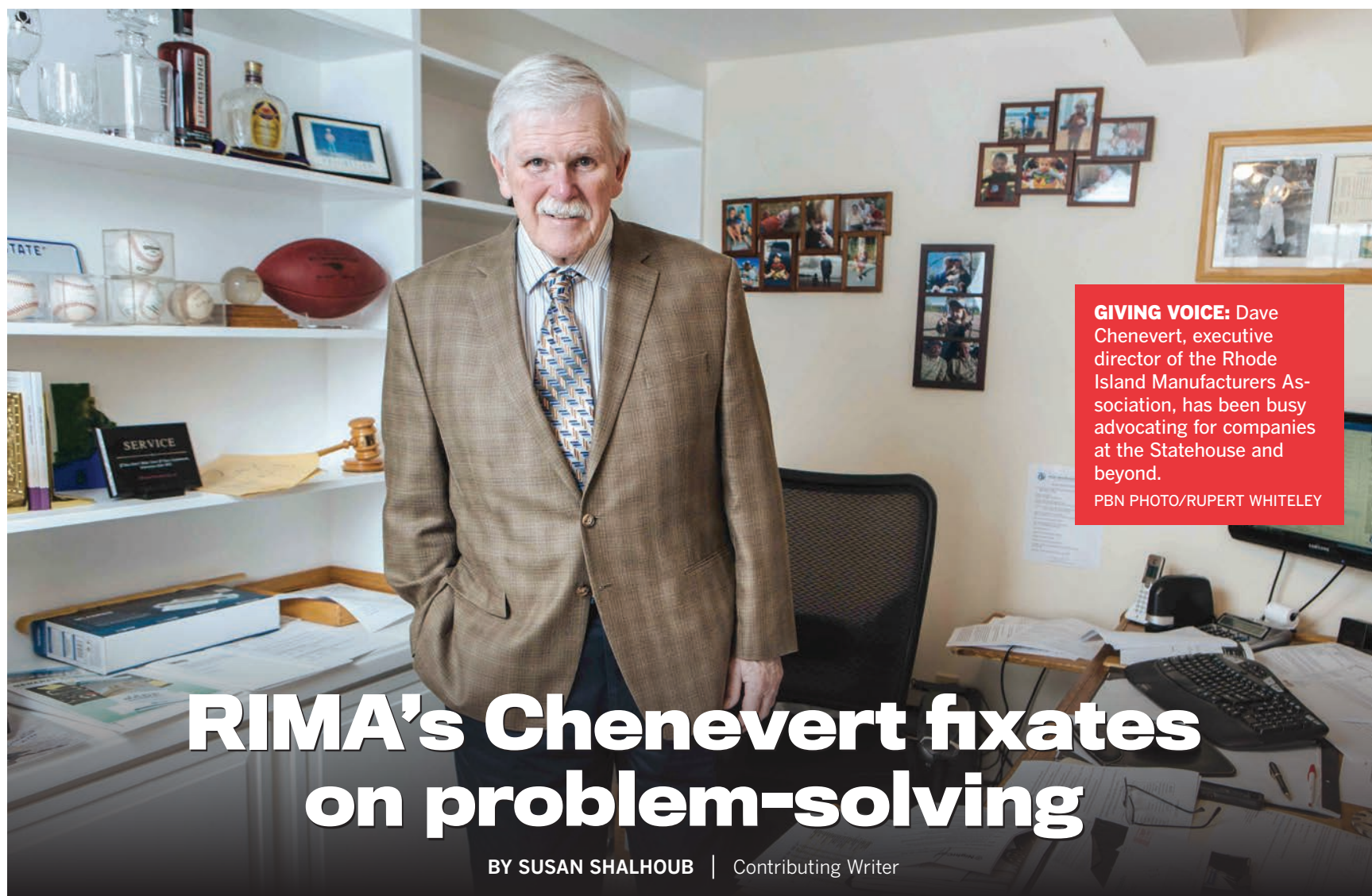


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RIMA's Chenevert fixates on problem-solving

BY SUSAN SHALHOUB | Contributing Writer

IF THERE IS ONE THING Dave Chenevert loves as much as solving problems or boosting Rhode Island's manufacturing sector, it's seeing results.

Sometimes, the executive director of the **Rhode Island Manufacturers Association** is solely responsible for those results; other times, he's part of a collaboration or passes concerns along to others who can solve them faster.

But whether he's leading the charge or co-ordinating from behind the scenes, Chenevert enjoys improving the industry.

"I was never one to look at a problem and say, 'It's someone else's issue to take care of,'" Chenevert said. "I can immerse myself in it, but [I] am then happy to step aside and let someone else do it."

The former owner of Swissline Precision LLC in Cumberland – which he operated for 31 years – Chenevert is dedicated to manufacturing. Not one to seek recognition, he was surprised that he was nominated for the Manufacturing Champion Award, and that he won.

"I don't look for stuff like this," he said. "I don't need to improve my resume. I am done with that."

What he is not done with is building and maintaining partnerships and collaborations with state legislators, manufacturers and regional leaders.

And others are not shy about singing his praises.

"No one in Rhode Island has dedicated more of their time and effort to help local manufacturers and supporting businesses," said Melissa Travis, a member of RIMA's board of directors. "The unique partnerships he established with Gov. [Gina M.] Raimondo's administration and Commerce Secretary [Stefan] Pryor have positioned Rhode Island for unprecedented growth and visibility on a national stage."

Chenevert and RIMA are a regional voice for the industry. The organization speaks on behalf of manufacturers when dealing with lawmakers, and it educates manufacturers about train-

ing resources and other matters.

Many students and job seekers are unaware of the opportunities being created as the industry evolves, Chenevert said. Companies, meanwhile, are too busy with day-to-day operations and are often not aware of available workforce programs.

"Our job is to be a conduit," Chenevert said. "A lot of people have told me that they are totally unaware a program exists [until we tell them]. It helps put a smile on your face."

One such program – a hidden gem for busy manufacturers – is the Work Immersion Program implemented by the Governor's Workforce Board. Beyond training, it serves as a way for employers to find talent. The state reimburses companies 50 percent of a participant's salary.

With 80 percent of state manufacturers being small organizations under 100 employees, Chenevert said, the Work Immersion Program is a valuable, affordable approach to hiring. Partner organization We Make RI screens candidates, and companies can see how they mesh with the culture.

Chenevert said RIMA's relationship with the governor's office and the state Department of Labor and Training is strong. The workforce-driven Real Jobs RI is a legislative result of that. "I give them valid points and they take that into consideration," he said. "I am the trusted voice, they try to do it with a logical approach – we're not there to argue."

In the future, Chenevert plans to work on dismantling barriers between manufacturers, building better alliances, for instance, between

makers of jewelry, textiles and tools. He also wants a more-level playing field for those in different manufacturing-business designations.

Chenevert's mind isn't always on business, however.

He enjoys hiking and attending baseball games to see his grandsons – ages 5 and 8 – in action. Chenevert has lived in Cumberland for 55 years and is an active volunteer in its youth sports programs (he helped establish the town's soccer program). He is also a founder of CumberlandFest, the town's popular annual festival.

He has no plans to slow down.

"Sometimes I think my wife convinced the [RIMA] board to let me be executive director so that I am not home too much," he joked. "But it's been fun. ... I enjoy utilizing knowledge and helping people." ■

'No one in Rhode Island has **dedicated more of their time and effort** to help local manufacturers and supporting businesses.'

MELISSA TRAVIS, RIMA board member



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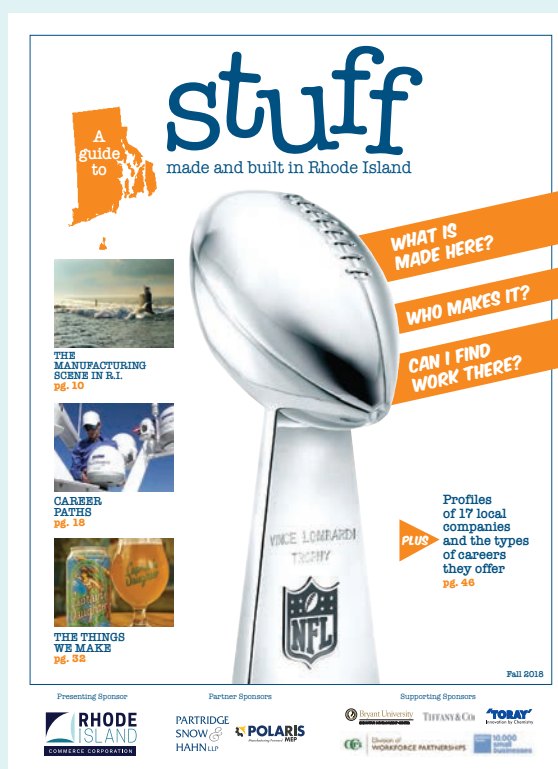
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