

Board Converting

NEWS

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Arrow Carton: Heading In The Right Direction

BY LEN PRAZYCH

Wisconsin is a midwestern U.S. state with the geographic anomaly of having coastlines on two Great Lakes (Michigan and Superior) and a vast interior of forests and farms. It is referred to as “America’s Dairyland” because the state is the leading producer of dairy products in the country and has a long history of cheese production. Those more familiar with the landscape will also know that Wisconsin is home to several major paper and corrugated industry machine manufacturers, as well



The management/ownership team at Arrow Carton, from left, Brian Wilke, Plant Manager, and owners Shad Young, Cam Young and Katie Gohlke.

as an abundance of integrated and independent converters, each vying for an ever-larger wedge of the state’s insatiable demand for boxes. It is in a competitive corner of greater Milwaukee in which Richfield, Wisconsin based Arrow Carton Co., a family-owned independent, now in its third generation, has carved a niche that only continues to grow.

The company was founded in the early 1970s by the late James Mayer, who was working for an aforementioned integrated. He realized there was a big demand for small runs, exactly the kind of work large integrators didn’t want to do. So Mayer purchased Arrow Carton Co., a small operation, which had been making boxes and related products since 1949, with the goal of running stock boxes in very small quantities. He began building business at his new sheet plant with five or six employees and a few pieces of old converting equipment.

Mayer never had grand plans to grow the company but discovered that when he provided a quality product and excellent service at a fair price – surprise! – his business grew. His daughter and son-in-law, Sue and John Gohlke, joined the business in the 1980s and continued expanding Arrow’s niche market of providing a steady stream of one-color brown boxes to a loyal customer base of small manufacturing companies throughout Wisconsin.

Mayer’s entrepreneurial spirit gave birth to a second sheet plant, Hartford Container, which he co-owned with his friend and business partner Dave Helbach, who would eventually start Baysek Machines, Inc. The two built Hartford Container with Mayer handling sales while Helbach managed production and the “making things work” side of the business. The partners then sold a productive and profitable Hartford Container to Menasha, where Mayer stayed on for a few years to funnel money into Arrow Carton and Helbach went on to achieve industry success with Baysek.

The Third Generation

Arrow Carton’s current president, Shad Young, began his career with the company in 1995, fresh out of college and looking for a job. He was dating Cam Gohlke, whose parents just happened to be looking for help in their family-owned sheet plant. Young began his job with Arrow as a laborer.

“I was feeding machines, bundling loads and whatever else needed to be done in the plant, never thinking my path would lead me to the corrugated industry,” says Young. “I grew to love boxes and how we’ve evolved as a small company within the industry. I’m amazed at the box making process and the output our machines produce.”

Young worked his way through the plant learning one thing, then another, before learning to operate converting machinery. After a while, Mayer asked him if he had any interest in sales. “Sure,” was Young’s answer. “In the morning I would work in the plant and in the

afternoon, I would knock on doors and sell," he says. "Jim wanted me to understand the 'art of rejection' and build my skills from there. I did it for eight months before graduating to sales full-time. We bought a design table but at the time, didn't have a designer, so I learned design, as well. I would cut samples and visit customers, which was the 'service aspect' that allowed us to build a lot of business and relationships."



A Serenco flexo folder gluer was one of two pieces of equipment that was moved to Arrow's Richfield facility in 2006.

Shad and Cam eventually married and now own Arrow Carton Co. along with Cam's sister, Katie Gohlke. Shad handles sales, design and a portion of production; Cam is a CPA and is Arrow's CFO, handling legal matters, Human Resources and all things financial; and Katie manages customer service and shipping. John and Sue Gohlke are still owners and sit on the company's board but are not active in the day-to-day operation of the business.

Growth Spurt

By 2006, with John and Sue Gohlke on the "tail end of their careers" and a waning desire for 60-hour work weeks, the third-generation made the leap from a crowded 17,000-square-foot footprint to a 50,000-square-foot facility in Richfield, Wisconsin, bringing with them the only



Arrow Carton added a Haire Group Apstar 2-color flexo folder gluer two years ago.

two major pieces of equipment that fit in the smaller facility: a Serenco 2-color 50-inch by 110-inch flexo folder gluer, and a 22-year-old first-generation Baysek C-170 diecutter.

With the additional room, Young added a used Ward 66-inch by 113-inch rotary diecutter, which immediately opened the doors for more business. "That was planned growth, but it kept escalating and we started getting tight pretty quickly," says Young. "But we were still missing something. We had the 50-inch machine but needed something smaller, so we found a used Isowa 38-inch 2-color flexo folder gluer, which filled a niche we weren't previously able to fill. Once we did that, it rounded us out. Our two flexos made a large variety of boxes and along with our two diecutters, a rotary and a flat bed, we had the tools to sell even more to our existing customers, while developing new ones in different industries."

Arrow Carton added a 66-inch by 110-inch Haire Group Apstar 2-color flexo folder gluer two years ago, adding even more flexibility and capacity to the independent converter that specialized in high-service, high-quality, fast turnaround on 100, 1,000 or 10,000 boxes.

The Benefits Of Baysek

Like many other small independents with a desire for growth, aligning with a sheet feeder is a significant event. In 2009, Arrow Carton was invited to join Schwarz Partners' Independence Corrugated Group in Oak Creek, Wisconsin. "That was a game changer for us," says Young. "It gave us more competitiveness in the market, gave us a platform with which to approach new customers and opened doors in more ways than I'd imagined. The relationship has become a huge selling tool that allowed us to keep on growing."



Arrow Carton's Baysek C-170 diecutter has become the 'work-horse' of Arrow Carton's converting machinery.

It was also in 2009 that Arrow invested in a brand new Baysek C-170 diecutter to replace the older model that had always been Arrow's one niche piece of equipment. Shad Young was approached by a customer that needed a box making company that was food-rated. Arrow promptly got AIB certified for direct food contact and not surprisingly, more business followed. "The Baysek diecutter was the catalyst for it all," says Young. "The mechanics of the diecutter – no tag nicking and multiple outs in a contained unit – made it ideal for food contact boxes. Being able to offer this service has been explosive for us. It's gotten us into many different industries and has allowed us to keep growing."

Young says Arrow Carton's Baysek C-170 diecutter has become the company's workhorse. Once producing 500 or 1,000 pieces per job, its quantities of "short-runs" have increased to 5,000, 20,000 and even 40,000 pieces. The C-170 is the busiest piece of equipment under Arrow's 50,000-square-foot roof, half of which is allocated to man-



Arrow Carton became AIB Certified for direct food contact in 2019, which provided more capacity for the Baysek C-170.

ufacturing, the other to raw materials and finished goods. The company has 35 employees and runs one shift, albeit a "very extended" shift. "We're working 12-hour days Monday through Friday and eight hours on Saturday, at least for the foreseeable future," says Young. "Our challenge, as it is for the rest of the industry, is finding enough employees to work a second shift."

There is inherent risk in relying on a single machine to produce such a significant amount of a company's product. What happens when "something happens" and the machine needs servicing or repairs?

"We can't put the work on another piece of our equipment, it has to run on the Baysek," says Young. "If something happens with our diecutter, Baysek is here immediately. It helps that they are nearby (Arrow Carton and Baysek Machines are about 120 miles apart), but it's im-



A Signode strapper/bundler moves quantities from 500 to 40,000 toward the door for delivery to customers in Wisconsin.

portant that we have service like this on a machine that is so niche-oriented and so critical to what we do. It's the service Dave Helbach and Baysek have provided for the last 25 years and it has only evolved to become even more attentive.

"Baysek Machines is the service-oriented company we emulate. They take care of their customers and so do we. It's what's allowed us to plan our future direction and continue to grow the way we have. Our flexos are always busy, but the machine that is always running is our Baysek diecutter. Always has, always will be."



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