

CAST POLYMER

Summer 2018

CONNECTION

Marble Works Two generations of excellence

ALSO:

- A visit with Polynt-Reichhold
- Preparing for the worst
- Operating a lean plant
- The importance of a consistent message



POLYCON'S
MOMENTUM

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ON THE COVER: While ICPA was in the Chicago area for POLYCON, the magazine visited two of our members: Marble Works and Polynt-Reichhold. Marble Works, our featured manufacturer, is a two-generation, family operation. In the inset circle (from left) are Rogelio Salazar, production manager for Marble Works, and Tom Wienckowski, owner of the company, who are first generation leaders. On the cover are their sons (from left) Tommy Wienckowski and Gabe Salazar working here on Marble Works new robotic jet machine.

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PRESIDENT'S LETTER

The energy of POLYCON 18



NOTHING IS MORE INVIGORATING TO A PROFESSIONAL in a certain field than the opportunity to meet up with colleagues and discuss what's happening in the industry or to learn the latest and greatest in technology or processes from the experts. POLYCON Chicago 18 was like a giant cup of coffee—a shot of caffeine that should keep us going strong into the next year.

The breakout sessions were packed with great information. The exhibit booth displays were outstanding and fascinating. The demonstrations provided practical information that only hands-on, show and tell can offer. Meanwhile, the networking was without question the best opportunity many of us will have all year to get away from the office and concentrate on being the quality producers of cast polymer products we know we can be.

This year's event truly was a leap forward for our association and for attendees, who left here anxious to take the energy and their newfound knowledge back to their shops to implement what they learned.

The lean manufacturing presentations by Brad Cairns and Lynn Thomson (see page 16) were particularly enlightening to me because it's an area of interest I feel is vital to most of us in the manufacturing world. We all know that the best way to succeed is to be the most efficient producer of what we make. But as Brad and Lynn pointed out, a more important reason for implementing lean is that it engages our own employees—gives them a foundation for why they do what they do and how they can do it in the best way, which translates directly into better products.

This session was only one of a host of crowded break-out sessions this year. We covered the gamut from legislative/regulatory updates to robotics to disasters to marketing

and stopped along the way for practical sessions on topics such as the latest developments in resins. Then we spent a day at the expansive plant of Marble Works (see page 8) in demonstrations that showed us everything from how to operate an Autocast to how to properly spray granite or repair gel coats.

This mix of practical and upper level learning is what our industry needs. We have several generations of professionals now striving to make this association and this industry grow, so the educational and networking opportunities

we provide need to mix the different generations together. I felt like this show accomplished that goal. Industry leader Royce Newsom, for whom our top award is named, would have been proud since he pushed hard for this mix in his last few years. Meanwhile, the greater attendance at this show allowed us a better opportunity for socializing and making new friends.

We announced at 2018's event that we'll be meeting in Kansas City next year, and we're already starting to plan for that event, which will be April 10-12. We chose that city because it's centrally located and easy to reach.

I'm counting on each of you to help Executive Director Jennifer Towner, the board, your meeting planners and me to make 2019's meeting an even bigger cup of coffee. ■

Luke Haas
ICPA President

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Building on the strong foundation

RAINY, COLD WEATHER AND A FREAK POWER OUTAGE an hour before the event began couldn't get in the way of how well POLYCON Chicago 2018 went. A survey taken after the event indicated just how strongly people felt: 93% of respondents gave the conference either the top rating of "excellent" (64%) or the next level of "very good" (28%).

Attendees from all over the U.S. and three other countries (Germany, Mexico, Canada) gathered at the Eaglewood Resort and Spa for the fourth POLYCON. Registration was up 12% over last year's attendance and by more than 37% from the first conference in Atlanta in 2015.

"We not only had more people signed up to attend, we also had four sponsors who pledged financial support at the top level, which helped us to defray more costs," said Executive Director Jennifer Townner.

"But it was the comments made by those who attended that indicate how important this conference has become to members," she added.



ABOVE: Attendees had many opportunities to visit with vendors.

BELOW: POLYCON 18 offered a host of educational sessions.





TOP LEFT: Dirk DeVuyst, ICPA secretary/treasurer, gives an annual report on the financial state of the association. TOP RIGHT: Sponsors had the opportunity to tell attendees about their latest and greatest products. Jack Simmons talks to attendees about ACS International. ABOVE: ICPA Executive Director Jennifer Towner thanks Larry Branan, The RJ Marshall Company, who has put the plant demonstrations together the last few years.

BELOW: POLYCON is a chance for old friends to meet and new friendships to form. From left are Chris Hurdleston, ACS International; Sandy and Don Luicana, Luicana Industries, Inc.; and Bobby Medlin, Majestic Kitchen and Bath Creations. BOTTOM: Steve Miller, Marshall Gruber Company, explains Autocaster maintenance and operation at the plant demos.



The Royce Newsom Pinnacle Award



Many people in ICPA recognize Ken Lipovsky when they run into him at a meeting. That's because he's been active in ICPA almost as long as he worked for Reichhold: more than three decades. He was a good friend for many years of the man whose name appeared on the award bestowed upon him at POLYCON this year—the 2018 Royce Newsom Pinnacle Award. It's the association's top award, given to a person who has gone above and beyond in helping ICPA and the industry.

Lipovsky chaired ICPA's technical committee from 2007 until last year, when Paul Henderson, Polynt Composites USA, Inc., took over. Before that, Ken served on the technical committees for both ICPA and the American Composites Manufacturers Association. He also has served on other committees or councils including groups for quality assurance, gel coats, solid surfaces and marketing.

But perhaps his greatest contributions have been the dozens of papers he's presented, talks he's given, articles he's written and special projects he helped put together in his quest to aid composites manufacturers in their quest for better processes. When asked which of these accomplishments gave him the most satisfaction, for example, he pointed to the paper (Basics of Solid Surface) he authored in 1999 on solid surface manufacturing.

"Before we put together that study, manufacturers were not really sure of timing or temperatures for post-curing parts to get the maximum performance. Everyone had their own methods and estimates," he said.

The reason it was so satisfying was because it's exactly what he's always liked to do and what he spent most of his career pursuing: coming up with scientific ways to find the ideal parameters for maximum performance—ways to help companies make better products and customers to make better profits.

Ken is now a consultant to the cast polymer industry after working with Reichhold 31 years. His last position was as cast polymer applications specialist. Before Reichhold he worked with the DeLorean Motor Company and Woodall Division of LOF Plastics, both in Detroit. He studied science, mathematics and engineering in school—the foundations that helped him build his long career.

"I have always been oriented to problem solving and technology," Lipovsky said. "Science and research was my way to get to do that," he said.



ABOVE LEFT: Leah and Ty Gaylord show off the product they created and attendees voted Best Innovative Design.



LEFT: Kelly DeBusk, owner of Composites Compliance, LLC (pictured here), and Tom Wienckowski owner of Marble Works, created a scavenger hunt for people visiting the plant demos on Friday. They deliberately set up Occupational Health and Safety Violations within the facility then invited people to point them out. Darren Suggs, owner of Marble Masters of Middle Georgia, won the contest.

RIGHT: Sean Jacobs, sales manager for ACS and an ICPA board member, presents the Most Innovative Manufacturing Technique to Pat Sak.



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What members said

One attendee summed well what many thought of this year's event as opposed to previous years.

"I think the feeling of community and organization was much more [prevalent] this year as we build up the program."

Even the newcomers who had never been to a POLYCON or ICPA event, however, said they found the experience uplifting.

"In my opinion—just having the chance to talk to other marble makers and sharing a tear on each other's shoulders...and a few beers, was worth the trip. I am so glad we joined ICPA at POLYCON!"

Attendees had specific suggestions for upcoming events, suggestions that have been passed along to the programming committee.

But in general, the comments indicated how important the meeting has become to members, who find it "a great opportunity to step away and meet with like-minded people in the industry," as one commenter said.

Award winners

An exciting highlight of any POLYCON is the bestowing of awards on those who've gone above and beyond in service or who have reached an outstanding achievement. This year's Royce Newsom Pinnacle award, named in honor of a long-

time leader of the industry who passed away two years ago, went to Ken Lipovsky, Reichhold, for his many years of service to the association and the industry. (see "The Royce Newsom Pinnacle Award").

Also honored this year was Tom Wienckowski, president of Marble Works, Elgin, IL. Marble Works hosted this year's plant demonstrations. ICPA President Luke Haas chose Wienckowski as the recipient of his president's award because of Wienckowski's efforts and his many years of loyalty to ICPA. (See profile on Marble Works, page 8).

This year, two awards were also presented for outstanding products. The awards were based on anonymous voting by the membership during the event. Winning for Best Innovative Design were Ty and Leah Gaylord, owners of House of Marble & Granite in Grand Junction, Colorado. The Gaylords are new members and this was their first POLYCON.

Receiving the Most Innovative Manufacturing Technique for a product was Pat Sak, general manager of U.S. Marble, who accepted on behalf of a design by Rick Foster, president of U.S. Marble, a long-time member.

Attendees also commented in the survey on the two product contests. As one person wrote: these competitions have "helped to highlight the artistic end of the process. They keep people looking for better ways to do things; foster learning and better the industry." ■



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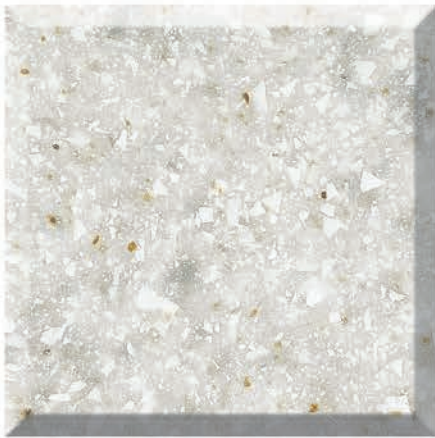
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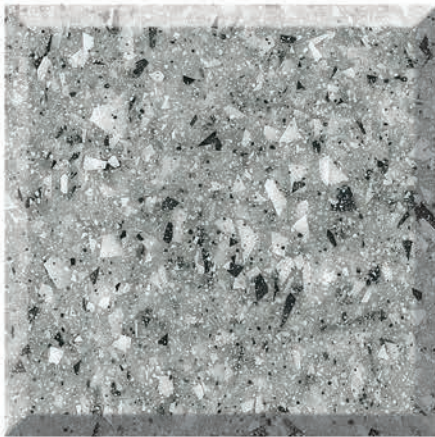
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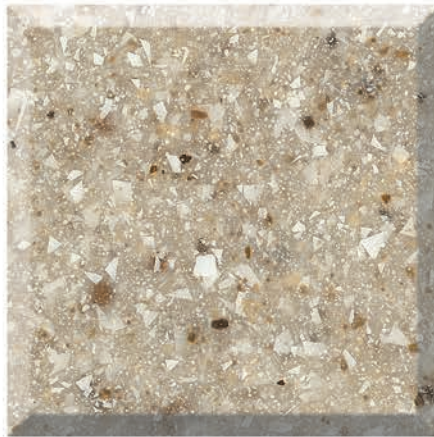
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From meat to marble:

How Marble Works came to be

BY GENILEE
SWOPE PARENTE

IF CIRCUMSTANCES AND A DEVELOPER'S DESIRE TO MAKE MORE MONEY for himself had not interfered, Tom and

Margie Wienckowski might have ended up grocers.

As it is, they are the driving force behind Marble Works, a kitchen and bath surfaces company in South Elgin, IL that offers a diverse line of products to a growing customer base, but that got its start as many in the cast polymer business did: a family-run company making cultured marble.

The current 45,000-square-foot plant, which hosted plant demonstrations at this year's POLYCON, is a second location for the company, which opened in 1989 in two buildings down the road. But Tom said it's a minor miracle the now-thriving company ever took form in the first place, much less came through the housing crash in such good shape.

Going out on their own

Tom was selling meat for a wholesale grocer back in the 1980s when he and his wife

Margie decided they wanted to set up their own business. Margie, who worked as the controller of her family's business, had a good business background while Tom intended to use what he'd learned in the food business. The two found a building in their area and made plans to lease it out to start a grocery business. When the deal was sufficiently close, Tom quit his job. However, before the store could get off the ground they went to visit their landlord, only to discover the deal had fallen through.



"The landlord found out his property was more valuable to him vacant because a land developer came in and bought the whole shopping center with the intention of leveling it. So there we were, starting from scratch," Tom said.

BELOW: The production floor at Marble Works is a busy place.
INSET: Tom Wienckowski, owner of the company, hosted this year's POLYCON plant demonstrations at his plant. He stands here at the company's reception desk outside a new showroom.

He found out about making cultured marble by answering a blind business ad from a company that was selling the molds and equipment. In researching what the company

was doing, Wienckowski thought the process of making cultured marble sounded like a viable business. However, further research revealed that the company who placed the ad did not have a stellar reputation, so Tom went in search of one who did, and ended up calling Gruber Systems.

At the time, he was told it would take a couple days for a salesman to get back in touch, but within an hour and a half, Tom Antcliff, a long-time, now-retired salesman for Gruber Systems, was calling Wienckowski back. Antcliff was a mile away from Tom's home at that very moment, which Tom said turned out to be serendipity. After meeting with Antcliff, who remains a good friend today, the Wienckowski's had a new possible business.

"The product intrigued me and when I investigated with a couple builders and wholesalers, I realized the market was in need of a quality manufacturer, and a diversity of products could be made," Wienckowski said.

He was in California being trained in the business less than a month after meeting Antcliff.

The early days

Marble Works grew steadily from those initial days, when it was Tom and a few production staff making cultured marble vanity tops. The business was 90% cultured marble almost exclusively in the builder direct market. By the time the crash hit in 2006-07, the company could barely keep up with demand and had 130 people on board making the product.

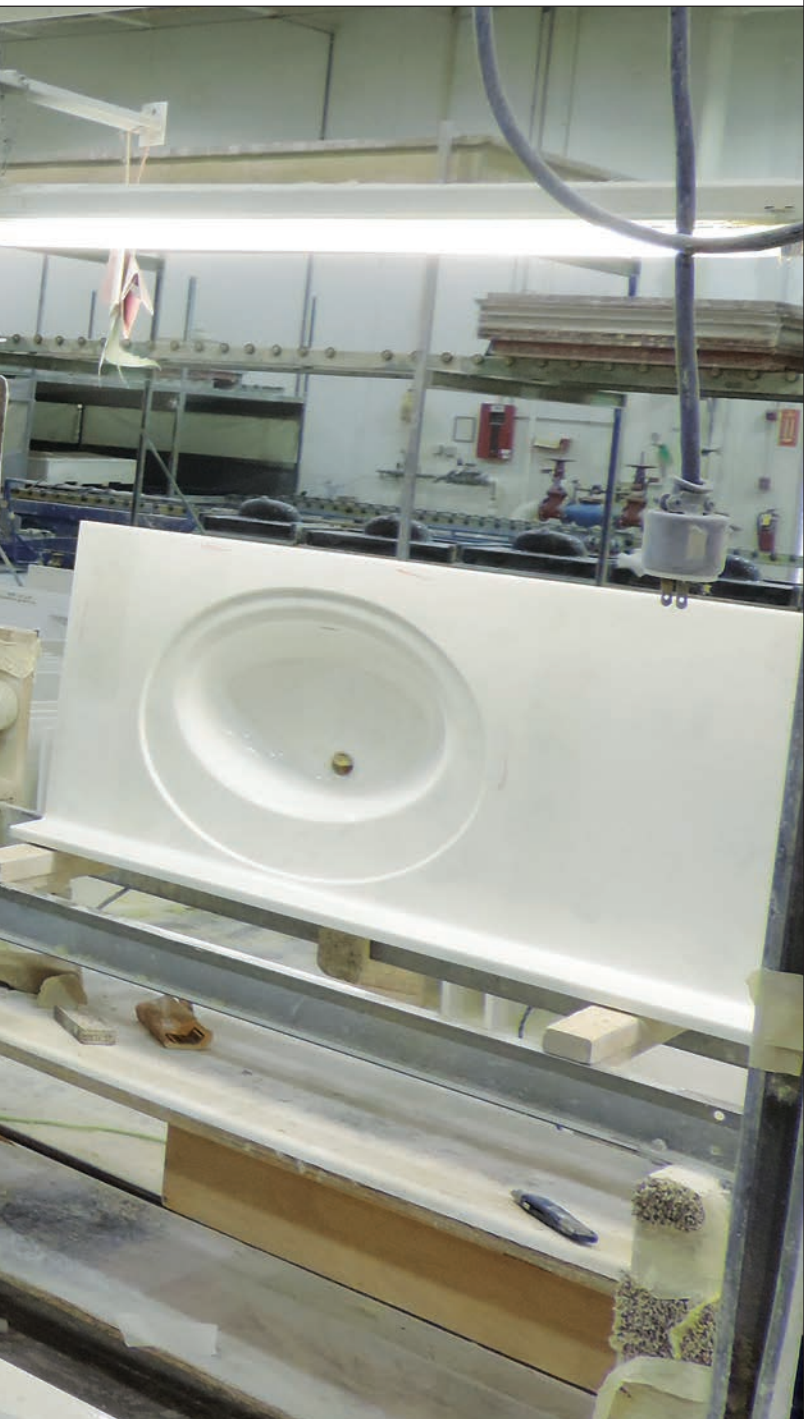
"Then, when the housing market went down, the business crashed dramatically," Wienckowski said. Although the company had the lion's share of the cultured marble industry in the Chicago market, the market itself dried up. Within a couple of years, the staff fell to about 30, and the company took a hard look at how it could survive.

Getting into areas besides cultured marble was the saving grace.

"We had always offered solid surface and granite as an alternative to cultured marble, but we weren't aggressive in marketing it," Wienckowski said. "That's partly because we had all the business we could handle from cultured marble. However, we did have the expertise in other surfaces," he explained.

Marble Works used that expertise and began to look at a new, more diverse product mix as well as new clientele.

Today, the company is back up to 70-plus employees, has a wide range of offerings in everything from granite to porcelain to laminate in both kitchen and bath products and does business with distributors, display companies, commercial builders and healthcare contractors. It's also looking into some retail sales. The company moved in 2002 to its current





Doug Sells, sales manager for the company, stands in the new showroom, which was redone to highlight to builders and buyers the diversity of what Marble Works makes.

plant and just this year, did a major renovation of its showroom.

"We wanted to better showcase what we can do both to our builders and to other types of customers," Wienckowski explained.

He said by far the most popular product right now is engineered quartz. "When you open any design book today, that's what you see," he said. Yet the company still has about a quarter of its business in cultured marble manufacturing.

However, the cultured marble of today is not what it was when he started in the business many years ago.

"I give much credit to the suppliers in this business. They have continually worked on early problems with the products—not even stopping their research and development when the market got so bad," Wienckowski said. "Today's cultured marble is far superior to what we were able to offer when we got into the business," he said.

Meanwhile, the other products have rounded out the company and given it a lasting strength it did not have when all its proverbial eggs were only in the cultured marble basket.

"The housing market has not recovered at the rate any of us had hoped. But it's getting there. What we learned in the mean time is: we'd never go back to being a one-product company," Wienckowski said.

"Today's cultured marble is far superior to what we were able to offer when we got into the business."

Today's situation

When asked what the biggest challenges to the business are today, Wienckowski cited lack of craftsmanship in the world of construction and making products.

"We're having a hard time finding good help and so are our customers," he said. The problem is that too many young people coming into the industry are focused so heavily on spreadsheets they fail to understand the need for the basic quality, he said.

"All they see are the numbers and all they look for are the lowest bidders. But whether we are dealing with someone setting in the cabinets or framing the walls, it affects what happens with our product and in our industry, and it all ultimately affects us," he added.

It also means that far too often, companies that do the installation of the surfaces are having problems because another party incorrectly put something in place.

"It's not our mistake, but it ultimately affects us and our reputation."

To Marble Works, that's particularly troublesome because the company has built an image with its builder and commercial customers of providing quality.

"We have a good reputation in our community and we sell our expertise—it's an important part of our products," Wienckowski said.

The next generation

Margie Wienckowski recently retired from working full time, but still works with Tom on guiding the company towards its goals.

Once his wife retired, Tom made the decision to at least slow down a bit and is taking a little more time off. One of the reasons he can do that is that the company has been around long enough to have a second generation coming in. Two up and coming employees in the company are his own son Tommy and his plant manager's son Gabe Salazar. Tommy pursued business

in college and is currently in charge of putting into place the robotic jets the company recently purchased. Gabe is the son of Marble Works' production manager and long-time employee Rogelio Salazar. Gabe is working with Tommy to bring more technology into the production area.

Meanwhile, however, Tom senior said he has no specific schedule for retiring because "I'm having too much fun right now." ■

GENILEE SWOPE PARENTE is executive editor of **Cast Polymer Connection**. Send comments and story ideas to gsparente@verizon.net.



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Simple steps that can mitigate or avoid catastrophe

BY DIRK
DeVUYST

OPERATING A COMPOSITES OR CULTURED MARBLE PLANT requires working with chemicals that need special care in handling to avoid potential fire hazards.

The two most dangerous components are organic peroxides, also called initiators or catalyst, and acetone. All cast marble plants use catalyst and many also deal with acetone. Both can be flammable when stored and used in a careless manner. Initiators have a low flash point and are also self-combustible.

EDITOR'S NOTE: This article stemmed from discussions and a session at POLYCON on what companies can do to protect themselves while handling certain chemicals. DeVuyt moderated that session and collected additional advice from companies.

Still, simple, common-sense housekeeping can help cast polymer companies prevent disasters in the plant. Here's what can be done:



Any initiator leak (think of the slave pump at spraying time, the Autocaster and Batchmaster pump and their lines, three-way valves and other situations where initiator may get out) needs fixing right away.



In chemical fires, water is key to dousing flames. That's because as chemicals ignite and use what's around them as "fuel," the fires build up heat very quickly. Powder types of extinguishers may douse the initial flames but cannot cool down the heat source. For this reason, plant managers need creative ways to keep

water close to where initiators are used. One easy trick is to position a 5-gallon bucket under the catalyst bottle of the spray system.

3 Casting areas should be cleaned up every day. When maintaining the equipment used in casting, the first thing technicians do is to put cardboard down to keep matrix off their clothes and shoes. However, that cardboard is a perfect fuel for a hungry chemical fire.

4 A tray filled with sand can be kept under the casting machines to catch dripping initiator, resin and cleaning fluid (such as “marble wash”). Sand itself is not a flammable substance. It’s important, however, to clean out the “sandbox” weekly.

5 Catalyst dispensing bottles are made of various types of thermoset plastics that are resistant to corrosive chemicals. These plastics become brittle over time, which means possible breakage or cracking. Plants should consider that spending \$125 per unit to put in new industrial bottles every few years is well worth the cost. The same idea applies to the plastic tubing

inside casting machines; that tubing should be periodically replaced.

6 Initiator dispensing bottles for spray systems and casting machines should be cleaned regularly. It’s truly amazing how fast “junk” such as fine dust particles, metal shavings and other contaminants build up on this equipment.

7 All initiator inventory should be stored as far away from the plant as possible. Only what’s used on a daily basis should be brought inside the casting or spray area. That storage area, which could be a plastic garden shed, also needs to be properly marked and locked.

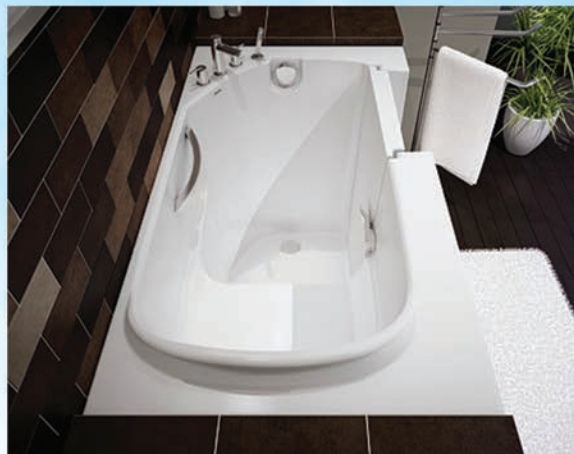
8 Any chemicals stored inside the plant should be kept in a flammables cabinet approved by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). Most cast polymer manufacturers use the (yellow) steel OSHA cabinets for flammables. Remember: leaky initiator and carbon steel are a bad combination because of the danger of corrosion. Consider adding a (blue) plastic-type storage cabinet for corrosive initiator storage.

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9 **Never** store combustible (initiator) and flammable (acetone, patch cups) items in the same cabinet.

10 Store other flammables (resin, gel coat, acetone, mold prep products) far away from the building. Consider a storage trailer that opens on two sides for easy access.

11 Any propane tanks (used for forklifts) must be kept in a locking storage cabinet outside the building: a propane company will supply these for free.

12 Housekeeping needs to occur daily, thereby avoiding pileups of trash, dust, cured matrix and other possible fuel materials.

13 Always move trash containers outside at the end of a shift. Imagine the combination of tape with curing gel coat, some kraft paper, maybe some matrix from a bucket in the same trash bin. What a perfect combination for a nice dumpster fire!

14 Discard what is no longer used: old molds have a ton of wood in their structure.

Know your policy

Another vital thing to remember when thinking in terms of undesirable events is that the protection insurance a business has may be the difference between recovery and further complications. Companies should read their insurance policies in detail and ask their agents or underwriters key questions. Here are some suggestions:

- Consider business interruption insurance (BI). In the event of a catastrophic event (such as fire, flood, tornado, snow loads that can cause roof cave-ins), BI will keep paying the business up to the pre-approved limit. That provides continuation for employee paychecks and for the business' gross margin, as if the company was still operating. **All manufacturers should have BI coverage.**
- Understand what "coinsurance" means as most policies have it. Coinsurance is the portion of coverage for which the business is responsible. Sometimes companies can negotiate or eliminate that percentage to better protect themselves.
- Read the fine print of the policy and pay attention to "exclusions." For example, many policies limit exposure to "tools, forms and dies." But what happens to a cast



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polymer manufacturer that finds itself in the position of not being able to replace its molds?

- Keep track of property, equipment and building contents: keep a running spreadsheet or asset manager tool and add every mold and machine purchase. Repeat this action for office equipment. Being “underinsured” is a common reality for many businesses. **Remember that being underinsured when subject to a coinsurance provision on your building or being underinsured on your equipment can mean money out of the pocket that’s needed to rebuild or be reimbursed.**
- Check to see if equipment is insured for full replacement cost.
- Check to ensure the casting machine is covered under the plant assets. Some policies have a special clause for this.
- Owners of buildings need to ensure that they are covered for the full amount it would take to replace those buildings. That includes costs to upgrade to codes or for demolition and cleanup before a new building goes up.

A few final tips

Besides being aware of how to handle chemicals and ensuring the company is properly protected, there are other steps manufacturers can take to protect against or to lessen the effects of disasters. A few of them are:

1. **Remember that the local fire department is a company’s best friend**, not the foe. Invite all three shifts of the local department into the plant yearly so they know how to maneuver in and around the building should it fill with smoke. Act on their suggestions to make the plant safer—they’re the experts. Insurance carriers typically send a loss prevention specialist into a business before policy renewal. Ask him or her to come quarterly and then fix what is pointed out as wrong. These specialists are also a friend, not the enemy!
2. **Conduct monthly fire training and document it.** This could be one of the best 15 minutes per month that managers and employees spend.
3. **Keep fire extinguishers inspected as required.** Although powder extinguishers are not the solution for chemical fires, there are many other types of fuel that turn into fire around a plant.
4. **Consider scanning all paper records and storing them in the cloud.** Copies of server files also should be stored to the cloud for redundancy. (Multiple copies in multiple locations give better protection.) Companies

also should enforce to employees that they save all files to the server. That server is typically the only computer in the office that is backed up. Employees should not make a practice of saving to the desktop or the C-drive.

Last, but certainly not least, cast polymer manufacturers need to connect with colleagues. The industry is unique in its level of comradery and willingness to help their fellow manufacturers. When disaster strikes, these companies find out their local “competitors” can be their very best friends.

Full disclaimer: this article was supplied to the ICPA and offered to its members as a practical tool to prevent catastrophic loss and to be better prepared should one occur. The association and this author both recommend you consult your local fire marshal, insurance carrier, OSHA consultant and other specialists to formalize the correct action plan for your specific business needs. ■

DIRK DEVUYST is the owner of International Marble Industries, Inc. and ICPA’s secretary/treasurer. He can be reached at dirk@imitoday.com.

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LEAN THINKING: start with a blank slate

BY GENILEE
SWOPE PARENTE

ALTHOUGH LEAN THINKING HAS BEEN AROUND FOR CENTURIES, it's not something that's ever a finished process for individual companies, according to Brad Cairns and Lynn Thomson, Center for Lean Thinking. The two speakers introduced POLYCON Chicago 2018 attendees to some basic concepts at one session, then went into more detail at a second session.

What came across at both, however, was that "lean is not a destination. It's a constant process. You've never arrived."

However, the journey is a sweet one that always results in major savings.

The place to begin

Going lean starts with a mind shift, the two speakers pointed out—a redrawing of things.

"It's like taking an etch-a-sketch and shaking it. You're

cleaning out all the undesirable effects of what's going on right now," Cairns said.

It's also redrawing on that etch-a-sketch to see things differently, he added.

For example, the order of priority in a company will change. There are four purposes to lean thinking, which are to make things: 1) Easier, 2) Better, 3) Faster 4) Cheaper.

Too many companies start with No. 4: Making things cheaper.

"The reason they think like this is that most businesses want to grow so they think in terms of taking more market share, getting more work, making their product more affordable," Cairns said.

Then they get the idea of making stuff faster to make even more money. However, "what happens when you ask 50 people to make things faster?" Cairns challenged the audience. The answer is: quality tanks.

"If you ever want to see things go awry in a factory, write 'rush' on the instructions board," he said.

"Lean thinking should start at the top: every decision and improvement we make should be designed to make someone's job easier," Cairns said. Whether it's plant personnel, the CEO or the customers themselves, such thinking builds on itself.

For example, if the job at the production line is easier to do, it gives individuals more time to focus on making a better product. Then if the system is working and producing good quality, "we start to produce more out of our factories. Throughput is up. So now if we want to do something such as lower our price or increase our market share, we can do it," knowing that quality will be maintained, Cairns said.

Seven deadly wastes

Lean thinking involves looking at waste everywhere it exists, no matter how trivial it might seem, the speakers told their audience.

"90% of everything we do is waste; once you see it, you'll see it everywhere," Cairns said.

Still, the rule of thumb for lean is not to think in terms of eliminating waste, but rather reducing it, he added.

That's because "a mental block occurs when we say we're going to eliminate anything," Cairns said. Instead, companies need to think in terms of progress: If I point out it's ten feet from point A to get to point B, and I say, let's make that eight feet, our minds don't automatically slam shut," he said. This is crucial because one of the most important aspects of putting lean operations in place is to get employees on board—to show that the purpose is to make the process better and easier—not to get in the way of people doing their jobs.

Thomson and Cairns outlined for the audience what the seven deadly wastes are in a company:

1. Transportation. This is how the product gets from point A to point B, be that a truck or by foot or the conveyor belt.

The speakers showed the audience a video of a man using a forklift to move piles of boards. He scoops them up and transports them elsewhere. What you don't know by watching him is that the purpose behind what he's doing is to find one board needed to remake a defective piece.

"Look how much pain was involved in finding just that one piece of wood," Thomson said. "But the guy operating the forklift doesn't know any better. He's trying to do this as fast as possible, he's not intentionally wasting time."

2. Inventory. According to Thomson and Cairns, there are four different types of inventory waste: raw materials, works in progress, finished products and obsolete parts and equipment. Waste occurs at all four points, and again, the goal is to reduce, not eliminate. "If you were to eliminate work in progress, for example, that's not good. But if you look at all of this as cash in the pipeline, any reduction increases the cash you can have in the bank," Cairns said.

"All inventory is directly related to your lead times," Thomson added. "The smaller your batch size, the less inventory you keep, the shorter the lead time is to the customer. You should look at every single pallet or skid of inventory, no matter which level, as wads of thousand-dollar bills," she said.

For too many companies, inventory is the water that hides the dangers beneath—companies think inventory gives them a safe cushion, but what it really does is hide problems within the processes.

3. Motion. This is the waste that occurs from actions not done logically.

The speakers showed another video of two people working back to back. A man picks up a piece from a grid, works on it at his work area, puts it back on the grid. Then a woman picks up that piece for the next level of production, goes to her work area, does her task, then returns it to the grid.

What's wrong with that picture? Cairns and Thomson pointed out that, since the workers are back to back, all the motion to and from the grid is a waste.

4. Waiting. This type of waste applies not just to an employee waiting for something to do their job, but to the machine sitting idle waiting for a product or the materials stacking up in front of a machine. Cairns suggested one way to envision where this waste occurs is to personify the parts of a process. "You wouldn't or you shouldn't make your own customers wait,"

Cairns pointed out. "That doesn't add value to the process."

5. Over- or under-processing. This involves using the wrong tool for the job or not doing certain steps properly, Thomson pointed out. "If you don't have the right tool, you exert more energy trying to do something right, and you are more likely to break something," she said. Under-processing is when the process itself is missing something needed to do the job right the first time. For example, email is an example of under-processing. The email received every day is overwhelming, yet much of it is back and forth clarifications because one of the parties doesn't understand. The reason they don't get what's being said? They can't see the person speaking—they don't have body language to cut down on the amount of time it takes to process the data.

6. Overproduction. Of all the areas of waste, producing too much is the biggest offender, the speakers said. They showed the Dominos pizza commercial featuring Dale, the

guy who can fold 900 boxes in just 15 minutes. "The guy is amazing. But how long does it take to make a pizza to put in that box: maybe 15 minutes," Cairns pointed out. His talent may be impressive, but it's a waste because the company can't make enough pizzas to fill those boxes.

The same kind of waste frequently occurs internally on the production line, Thomson pointed out.

"If I'm making widgets at 10 per hour and the next person down the line makes widgets at seven an hour, I'm holding my three widgets back waiting for the next person," Thomson pointed out.

7. Defective output. This kind of waste occurs all the time and is covered up all the time. Yet it feeds on itself and involves multiple levels. For example, when a defective part must be redone, the labor has already been paid for, the materials purchased, people have already moved the product down the line, the machine has already been tied up once. When it comes time for the remake, all the steps that came before must be recreated.

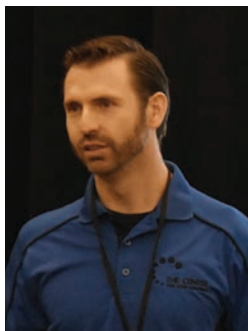
"It's a ripple effect that creates chaos and more defects," Thomson said.

Visualizing

Cairns and Thomson both pointed out that videos such as those they showed at POLYCON are a great tool for finding waste, but also for showing personnel why thinking lean is vital.

"No one goes to work to waste time or resources," Thomson said. "They just don't see it. We might sit back and study what's happening and recognize where improvements are needed; we're managers. But we have to get our own people to see it," she said. ■

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Brad Cairns at POLYCON 18

Brand Marketing **in the** Digital Age

BY GENILEE
SWOPE PARENTE



ALTHOUGH SMALL- TO MEDIUM-SIZED COMPANIES sometimes view social media, search engine optimization, website design and maintenance, blogs and other modern channels as a superhighway they dread, “any company today needs to know what it’s like to conduct business on the internet,” Linda Lullie, the founder of Inspired 2 Design, LLC, told POLYCON attendees. They also need to connect what they do in the digital world with their entire company’s marketing efforts.

The place to begin the journey is to identify and consistently showcase a company brand.

“When we talk about brand, we’re talking about who you are as a company and what you believe in,” Lullie said.

“If you exist to be an innovator in design in kitchens and bath, for example, or if you exist to make it easier for your customers to do business, these values should be outlined in a mission statement or statement of values or goals and carried through in all you do.”

Once core values are identified, they become a guiding light on the journey to success, she said, and they can be used at all levels of communication.

“Your brand is who you are,” she explained. “Marketing is what you do with that brand.”

Lullie referred to a quote by Jeff Bezos, founder of Amazon, who said “Your brand is what people say about you when you’re not in the room.”

“So how do we get people to say good things about us?” Lullie challenged the audience.

Be consistent in presenting your message

Once a company has identified its brand, it needs to ensure the brand is presented in every company message. That means online, in brochures, how employees answer the phone, how the logo is presented, what is said on the web, etc.

“Over time, this creates an emotional connection with your customers and your audience,” she said.

For example, Amazon prides itself on “fast and anything you want” while Visa “is accepted everywhere,” she said. These companies put a lot of resources behind those words, but they also stress everywhere in their operations and their dealings with customers that their services are built around “fast” (for Amazon) and “everywhere” (for Visa), she said.

Carrying the message of a brand also means recognizing what customers truly go through every time they interact with the company, she said.

“It’s all about the experience today. Everyone is touchy-feely, and they want you to stand for something,” she said. That experience begins before a person ever enters a shop or showroom.

Lullie said companies need to consider: “How did they [customers] find you: your website, google maps, did they see a sign on the road, did that sign have the same color and design as your website? When customers call: do they get put on hold? Do they have to go through multiple levels or channels for phone interaction? When they make it to your location, was your parking lot clean, your facility welcoming? None of these individual things are what’s needed; however, the consistent message needs to follow through on multiple channels,” she said.

The reason all of this is so vital is because the digital world is moving at lightning speed and people are bombarded today with so many messages that individual attempts to communicate have become complicated, she said.

Know your audiences

Another challenge in the digital world today is that there are so many channels over which to communicate—from Instagram to YouTube to Facebook to chatbots.

“The internet is not a static tool anymore and it’s changing rapidly every day,” she said.

One way to narrow it down is to recognize which audiences use what channels. For example, Facebook used to be for a younger generation, but that’s no longer the case.

“People under the age of 30 are probably not going to be on Facebook; but if you’re looking for homeowners over 40, it’s a good place to establish a presence,” she said.

Meanwhile, millennials and younger generations have created their own ways to communicate via texts, memes, emoticons, hashtags, videos. Also, the younger generations today are much more cognizant and demanding that companies be socially responsible and that as consumers, they are dealing with a business where real people are running the company.

“It’s a challenge for those of us who own businesses, because even if they [millennials and younger] are not our

main audience today, we have to talk to them at some point. They are the generation about to own homes—we have to know how to appeal to them,” she said.

Be aware of what’s said

Another challenge today is to track how your brand looks to its audiences.

“We as businesses have a lot less control than we ever did because customers are much more informed and autonomous. They make decisions often before they ever talk to you,” she pointed out. Search engines are the leading way people today find a company—Forrester Research reports that three-quarters of consumers do more than half of their research online before making any offline purchases, Lullie reported.

That’s why reviews can be so worrisome, yet important.

“Customers can either be your greatest advocates or your worst critic,” she pointed out. Companies need to lose their fear of reviews and simply be aware of what is being said, even when the comments are negative. When they are negative, they should find proactive ways to react.

“It all stems back to who you are as a company. If your goal is to provide the very best customer service and you’re getting bad reviews, something needs fixing,” she said.

Know your channels

Lullie classified today’s companies into three probable categories: those that are old school and have a website that’s been static for years; those that are presently catching up with the times and may even have a mobile presence, a blog and make changes to their web sites occasionally, and those that are forward thinking. The forward thinkers keep their sites up to date sometimes by using outside experts, have fresh content on their sites, and have a look and a site that translates well into mobile applications such as tablets and phones.

No matter where a company is, however, establishing the brand and carrying it through is the backbone to moving forward.

“We all have a footprint. It starts with tools like our logo, our brochures, our signage, but it extends out into social media, our web presence, how we appear in search engines. The most important factor in learning to deal with this new digital era is to recognize our own brand and make sure that, no matter where it’s presented, we are giving out the message we’ve chosen,” she said. ■

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Polynt-Reichhold: Becoming the largest composites resin supplier

IN MAY OF 2017, POLYNT AND REICHOLD announced they'd received regulatory approvals and closed their agreement to merge to become Polynt-Reichhold, a global chemical company in the intermediates, coatings and composites resins, thermoset compounds, gel coats and specialty chemicals businesses.

The news generated excitement throughout the cast polymer industry because it made the company the largest composite resins supplier in the world and created a powerful research and development force.

Yet Polynt itself has been around many years, getting its start in Europe, working its way into North America, expanding vertically both backwards by acquiring intermediates businesses and forward by getting into the gel coats and compounds businesses.

"Polynt has a long history in the European Union for intermediates, composite resins and composites compounds," Matt Hayden, applications manager, explained recently during a visit by **Cast Polymer Connection** to the company's U.S. headquarters in Carpentersville, IL.

"Last year's announcement with Reichhold added another portfolio of resins on both the coating and composite product lines," he said.

Historical perspective

Polynt's birth was in 1955 when it opened its first industrial site in Scanzoroscate (Bergamo, Italy). During the next 60 years, the chemicals specialty company expanded to include five Italian sites, then a network of production and commercial sites in China, Hong Kong, Germany, Poland, France and Spain.

Polynt entered North America when it bought the coatings and composites resins business of Momentive Specialty Chemicals in 2011. The Carpentersville, IL plant from this acquisition has become the American headquarters for Polynt.

The company then expanded globally by acquiring the composite resins and gel coat business of CCP in 2014, a company with its own 100-year history.

The joining of Polynt, CCP and Reichhold created a chemical leader whose capabilities include the ability to service all the composite end-user industries as well as offering a strong coatings resin portfolio, Hayden explained.



"The goal is to be a global specialty chemicals, polymers and intermediates company with expertise in the composites and coatings sectors," Hayden said. The company not only combined technologies across the merged companies, but also created a network of plant

ABOVE: David Briesch, pilot plant manager, monitors the pilot plant production facility.

BELOW: Lyubov Germanovich, analytical chemist, studies resin samples.



locations accessible to customers throughout the nation.

Hayden said this means a continuation of a “strong focus on customer service. Customers keep coming back to our custom solutions, quality and consistency, and variety of technologies available,” he said.

The plants the company now have stretch across this continent as well as the globe, enabling it to “move end products around to be closest to end users,” Hayden explained.

Within the composites sector, “most of the materials come from a batch process,” Hayden said. The company then customizes these batches to meet individual company needs.

“We also have the ability to change the materials for the customers to meet new requirements or seasonally adjust to their needs,” he said.

Research and development

For a chemical specialties company, one of the most vital aspects of customer service is technical expertise. Polynt has dedicated research centers throughout the globe as well as several major facilities in the U.S. It also has a team of scientists that work in the field on customer implementation and troubleshooting.

“Having technical service chemists with expertise in different sectors helps to ensure that the materials coming from the lab to the scale-up process in our plants [migration from the lab to testing to implementation] and finally the scale-up process at the customers’ facilities run smoothly,” he said.

The lab in Carpentersville, for example, is a world class facility that houses research staff, as well as state-of-the-art analytical, testing and synthesis equipment. Also at the facility are the team members who make up the administration, customer service, quality control, accounting, purchasing, executive and operations staff. Outside the lab is a top-of-the-line pilot plant that scales up and runs samples on products across most of the resident technologies in coatings and composites.

Among the projects the lab itself focuses on are finding ways to improve performance for various types of resins, qualify new raw materials and create new resin chemistries.

“Of interest to ICPA from the Polynt research teams in the U.S., would be the next generation of gel coats with improved toughness and UV [ultraviolet] resistance and composite resins that meet any future requirements for reduced styrene and VOC [volatile organic compound] emissions,” Hayden said.

Thoughts on the industry/association

Hayden said the two developments that have affected ICPA customers the most in the years Polynt has been around are



Michael Mathews, composite applications engineer, inspects a cast polymer sink undergoing thermal cycle testing.

The major milestones of Polynt:

1955: Opening of FTALITAL (in Italy) dedicated to phthalic anhydride production

1965: Alusuisse S.A. acquires FTALITAL

1970s to 2000s: Growth through acquisitions and expansions in Europe; renamed Lonza S.p.A in 1975

2006: Lonza S.p.A. changes name to Polynt and is listed on the Italian Stock Exchange

2008: Investindustrial takes Polynt private

2011: Acquisition of Composites and Coatings Resins from Momentive Specialty Chemicals

2014: Acquisition of CCP Composites from Total

2017: Combination with Reichhold

the housing boom and bust, and changing consumer tastes in the residential sector.

As far as housing, the current situation is definitely looking positive from Polynt’s perspective. “We see and predict healthier housing markets this year and in the near future, which is good news for ICPA members,” Hayden said.

Meanwhile, tastes in the residential market are leaning toward more interest in engineered stone, which means many consumers are looking for surfaces companies to become more diverse. For Polynt-Reichhold that means looking at new ways to support the industry through innovations in resin, Hayden said.

Meanwhile, the organization continues its strong ties to the cast polymer industry through membership in ICPA and other trade organizations as well as actions such as serving as a platinum sponsor at POLYCON Chicago this year.

“We want this industry to continue to grow, be innovative, and be healthy. Supporting the ICPA helps achieve these goals,” Hayden said. ■

It's time again for membership renewals

ICPA's fiscal year is up at the end of June, which means membership renewal invoices will be sent out to members soon. The dues will take members from July 1, 2018 to June 30, 2019.

Membership in ICPA provides many key benefits including reduced rates for POLYCON 2019. Other benefits include:

- Access to the members-only resources on ICPA's website where members will find key papers, research, reports, videos and educational materials, information on the latest regulations and much more.
- A monthly newsletter and quarterly magazine geared to cast polymer professionals.
- Participation in the association's group forum page to discuss and seek answers to critical manufacturing and regulatory issues affecting the industry.
- Access to other members who are technical experts or have years of experience to help solve problems or address important issues.
- Representation globally through listings and advertising/sponsorship opportunities.
- A voice in Washington, D.C. to keep track of what's happening and influence lawmakers and regulators.
- A way to build meaningful and lasting relationships with like-minded people within the industry

For information, visit the website www.theicpa.com or write Jennifer Towner at jennifer@theicpa.com.

Luke Haas to serve another term

At the annual meeting at POLYCON Chicago 2018 the ICPA Board of Directors voted unanimously to add two manufacturer seats to the board for a total of 11 member seats. All current board members have agreed to serve another term. Luke Haas, Elite Marble Company, has agreed to be president of the association for another year and Dirk DeVuyt, International Marble Industries, Inc. will remain secretary/treasurer. Other current board members remaining leaders for the coming year include:

- **Immediate Past President:** Bill Sanders, Alamo Marble, Ltd.
- **Manufacturer Directors:** ReBecca Erdmann, Sand & Swirl, Inc.; Bobby Medlin, Majestic Kitchen & Bath Creations

- **Supplier Directors:** Larry Branan, The RJ Marshall Company; Sean Jacobs, ACS International; Ken Legenza, Interplastic Corporation; Paul Henderson, Polynt Composites USA, Inc.
- **The two newly elected board members are:** Mark Buss, general manager of Virginia Marble Manufacturers, and Matthew Pullium, vice president of Operations at AGCO, Inc. Both of these men will serve a two-year term beginning July 1, 2018.

ICPA welcomes new members

ICPA welcomed these new manufacturer members recently:

Artistic Marble Corporation in Montgomery, AL; **House of Marble & Granite** in Grand Junction, CO; **Royal Baths Manufacturing Company** in Houston; **SFI, Inc.** in Sparta, WI, and **Virginia Marble Manufacturers** in Kenbridge, VA.

ICPA also welcomed two new supplier and affiliate members: **Patcham USA** and **Superior Oil**.

Kansas City site of POLYCON 2019



Planners for next year's

POLYCON recently announced that Kansas City will be the site of the meeting and the dates are set for April 10-12. The location was chosen for ease of access—it's centrally located—and two members in the area have volunteered to open their facilities for the programming for 2019. All the latest news and venue announcements can be found at the POLYCON website, POLYCONevent.com. ■

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