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NEWS

Flying ‘Under The Radar,’ American Box Company Soars

BY LEN PRAZYCH

Until 2016, Shawnee, Kansas based American Box Company had, according to Vince Hayden, one of the company’s four owners, always flown “under the radar.” It was back then, fueled by new equipment purchases and subsequently, a change in ownership, the company began branching out and expanding to new and unforeseen production heights.



Garrett Bradley, left, and Vince Hayden are two of four owners (the others are Jeff Sharfstein and Ron Lemar) of Shawnee, Kansas based American Box Company, which the group purchased last year.

American Box was originally founded as American Box & Tape Co. in November 1975, when two former co-workers from General Box Co. first opened its doors in North Kansas City, Missouri. With the partners’ nearly five decades of packaging experience and a burning desire to become a leader in Kansas City’s independent corrugated market, the company prospered and to this day, has some of its original “captive” core customers.

Hayden, a son of one of the original two owners, purchased the company in summer of 2021 with Jeff Sharfstein, the former owner of Strive Group, which was purchased by Menasha eleven years ago, Ron Lemar of Rex Carton, and Garrett Bradley, formerly of Bennett Packaging, who is president of American Box Company.

Hayden joined the company in 1995, when American Box was operating out of a 40,000-square-foot “landlocked” facility prior to moving to its current location in Shawnee in 2014. Bradley, who had been with Bennett Packaging for 27 years, was selling capital equipment

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ND Paper To Convert Paper Machine At Wisconsin Mill

ND Paper, the U.S. subsidiary of Nine Dragons Paper (Holdings) Limited, is taking critical steps to build on its growth in packaging products. At ND Paper’s Biron, Wisconsin mill, the company will be converting its B26 paper machine at the end of 2022 from coated mechanical papers to lightweight, high-strength recycled packaging products.

Today, the Biron Division, located in central Wisconsin, employs more than 300 full-time personnel and operates two paper production lines with a combined annual production capacity of approximately 530,000 short tons. Its B25 paper machine produces approximately 270,000 short tons annually of corrugating medium and linerboard for packaging applications, while the B26 machine produces approximately 260,000 short tons annually of lightweight coated mechanical (CM) papers for end uses like catalogs, magazines and retail inserts.

Upon completion of the conversion, both the machine and the mill will have increased annual manufacturing capacity. The B26 machine will have capacity for over 500,000 short tons of packaging paper, and the mill, in

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with Barberan when the opportunity with American Box presented itself. "We came into the ownership of a very well-run company with a great team of employees," says Bradley. "Our business really took off when people started having everything delivered to their doorstep. And business only appears to be getting better."

Darth Vader

"Like many other independent box makers, we've enjoyed tremendous growth and we're very fortunate that business is good," adds Hayden, who took over day-to-day operations of American Box 10 years ago. He relied on the instincts sharpened from decades of corrugated industry experience to invest in a game-changing piece of equipment in early 2020, just prior to the onset of Covid-19.

"Everyone thought I was losing my mind when I made my 'pandemic purchase,'" he says of Haire Group's newest line, the FD 618, a 4-color, 24-inch by 70-inch high-speed mini flexo folder gluer. "Our mini was running at capacity when Haire came out with this newest machine and we saw an opportunity to grow our line. The machine was a perfect fit. We call it the Darth Vader."

Like the fictional protagonist of the Star Wars trilogy, the new machine is as intimidating as it is powerful and is indeed a force to be reckoned with. Manufactured in Italy by EDF Europe, the European division of Dongfang Precision Group, the machine boasts a die cut section and can

produce 24,000 pieces per hour. EDF has installed seven machines in Europe but American Box was the first installation in the United States. Hayden praises the machine's set up while run and order recall capabilities.

"We put it in to handle some of the capacity that we saw during the pandemic and it's paid off extremely well in that regard," says Hayden, who ordered the machine just af-



American Box's 'Darth Vader,' EDF Europe's 4-color flexo folder gluer from Haire Group, can produce 24,000 pieces per hour.

ter the lockdown began. Haire Group technicians installed "Darth Vader" in October of 2020 and it was up and running in two weeks. An EAM Mosca Unitizer provides front and back end support, respectively.

Although it did alter some start times, stop times and

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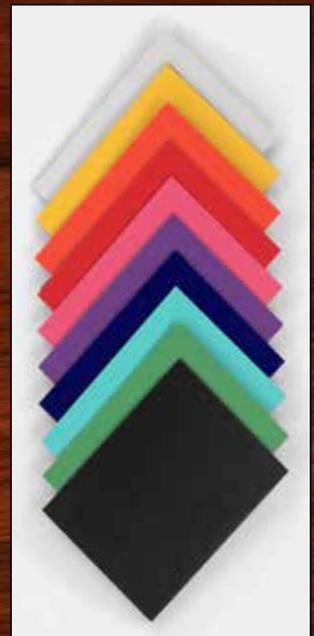
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break cycles to “maintain distancing,” American Box never shut down due to the pandemic. The company was fortunate in that its approximately 50 employees – and about 25 temporary employees, as needed – experienced no infections through the heart of Covid-19. The few infections



An EAM Mosca Unitizer efficiently supports American Box Company's increased output.

that did strike the company occurred during the spread of the Omicron variant.

Second To None

When it was founded in 1975, the original partners of American Box & Tape Co. dedicated themselves to providing superior customer service and reliability “second to

none,” principles the current ownership team has wholeheartedly embraced. American Box continues to be a critical resource for the design and manufacturing of custom packaging, displays and packaging supplies for its new and old customers today. The company runs extended 10-hour shifts four days a week. It does not own a corrugator; it buys its sheets on the open market. The specialty



American Box Company invested in a new Apstar 1632 die cutter from Haire Group in 2018.

items and displays that represent about five percent of American Box's business – the remaining 95 percent is up to 4-color brown box – ships throughout the country to customers as far away as California to the west and New Jersey to the east.

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The company's long relationship with Haire Group was more solidified in 2016 with the purchase of a used J&L Specialty Folder Gluer, followed by purchases of smaller machinery and some conveyor. In 2018, Hayden decided to put in a brand new Apstar 1632 die cutter, one of the first in the market to be all servo-driven, which significantly



increased American Box's footprint, its capabilities and the quality of its boxes.

"From when we were founded until our first Apstar installation in 2018, we were pretty heavy on the brown box side," says Hayden. "The Apstar's 4-color capability

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APSTAR

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allowed us to start branching out. We also brought in a little litho and some digital into our mix and got into the display side of the business. And now with the surge in e-commerce, we're doing a lot of inside-outside printing."

A Second Apstar

American Box's next investment is a second Apstar, a 3-color flexo folder gluer with a rotary die cut section scheduled for installation later this year and an Alliance load former for back end support. Due to the company's rapid growth and the capacity needed now, however, the company is buying some other pre-owned equipment that will go on line as soon as possible. "Waiting until Q4 just isn't feasible," says Hayden. "We need instant support."

When the next 30,000-square-foot is added to the company's existing footprint and the new Apstar is installed, it will join a 63-inch by 124-inch 4-color Apstar with rotary die



American Box Company continues to benefit from the innovation and reliability and of AG Stacker's machinery and support.

cut section; an Emba mini-24-inch by 63-inch 2-color flexo folder gluer; an Isowa 66-inch by 150-inch rotary die cutter; a Koppers 50-inch by 113-inch 2-color rotary die cutter; a converted – with the help of AG Stacker – 50-inch by 103-inch Cooper 2-color flexo folder gluer, one of the company's original machines; an S&S 38-inch by 95-inch 2-color flexo folder gluer; and two flatbed die cutters, one an FDC 1410 and the other, an FDC 1612. A new material separator and scrap system was installed in 2014 by Paper and Dust Pros of Kansas City and in 2021, American Box installed a BCM ink kitchen so it could do more custom blending and matching for more of its high-graphic jobs.

The company will be well-positioned to manage the future growth that shows no signs of slowing. According to Hayden, some of the business has been organic and some is coming from new companies who are reaping e-commerce opportunities in the region, which in the last five years has become a mecca for warehouses and distribution centers.

"We have the benefit of being centrally located. The abundance of containers moving through this area has created a lot of opportunities for companies to come here and succeed," says Hayden. "Goods are also flowing in from overseas to be fulfilled and shipped from what is the geographic center of the country and some companies are moving here for just that reason."

American Box has four direct sales people and work with a network of distributors and brokers with whom it has maintained long-term relationships, which only leads to more business and growth. "We continue to grow our customer base more directly but there have been and still are, a lot of prominent companies in the Kansas City area," adds Bradley. "My philosophy has always been that we should look in our own backyard first."

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