

The Job Done

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Hall of Fame

AICC Inducts
 Jamestown Container's
 Joe Palmeri

"It's the heart and soul of Joe. He loves the AICC."
 —Helen Palmeri, pictured here with Joe



AICC members met in December 1996 to put in place a long-range plan that is still in use today.

Crowning Moments

The Association of Independent Corrugated Converters' (AICC) long-range plan and SuperCorrExpo® are two projects that Joe Palmeri, vice president and chief operating officer of Jamestown Container Corp. in Falconer, N.Y., refers to as his "proudest moments."

AICC presidents still use the long-range plan as a boilerplate for meetings.

"When you get on the board of the AICC you're on there for a long time and every president wants to make a mark for himself. I just thought to myself, if you had a game plan, it wouldn't have a change of direction with every new chairman or president," Palmeri says. "They're still using the long-range plan and it makes life a lot easier for the incoming president because he doesn't try to reinvent the wheel."

SuperCorrExpo was an idea that grew out of the long-

range plan and marked the beginning of a partnership between two associations that for years worked separately. The show consists of five days of conferences and workshops and an exhibition area featuring running machinery.

"We needed to start working more closely with other organizations, and this is how the TAPPI alliance started to be discussed," says AICC President Steve Young. "Joe saw the value of working together and that's how SuperCorrExpo started. Wayne Gross (TAPPI's executive director) and I got together. We both had trade fairs. We both had the same exhibitors and so we built a show. That deal culminated in the first show in 2000."

"TAPPI and AICC needed to get together," Gross says. "That was my first opportunity to meet Joe Palmeri. Joe brought a lot of energy, focus and attention to the activity and was a big player in being able to pull SuperCorrExpo off."

in 1996] liked to tell the story about Joe showing up at a board of directors meeting and walking out on the beach in his suit and his wingtips, and Dick is there in his Bermuda shorts and Hawaiian shirt, and Joe says, 'Look at all these people out here wasting time.'"

Even Palmeri's wife, Helen, says her husband has been known to mow the lawn wearing a white dress shirt.

Always Giving Back

One characteristic that AICC members often mention when Palmeri's name is brought up is his generosity.

"He there for everybody and anybody in the association," says Mort Ackerman, managing member, Ackerman Consulting Group LLC, Fort Lee, N.J. "He gets pleasure when people call him and say, 'Can you help me?'"

In a world where "business casual" has replaced the suit and tie, Joe Palmeri resists. The vice president and chief operating officer of Jamestown Container Corp. in Falconer, N.Y., has been known to walk on a Hawaiian beach in wingtips.

But his professionalism is much deeper than his wardrobe. What defines him is his love of the corrugated business, his devotion to his family, his eternal optimism and his genuine interest in helping others succeed.

Palmeri's no-nonsense style along with his abundant generosity has branded him as a respected leader in the business world, especially among his peers in the corrugated container industry.

"Joe Palmeri is one of the best examples of leadership, vision and understanding in the industry," says longtime friend Jay Wertheimer, president of Wertheimer Box Corp., Chicago. "Joe is a role model for values and excellence in measurable performance and he's a heck of a nice guy."

Last month, the Association of Independent Corrugated Converters (AICC) inducted Palmeri into the AICC/Paperboard Packaging Hall of Fame. His accomplishments over the last 48 years are numerous and noteworthy. He is an AICC founding member and has served in almost every AICC chair.

AICC members got a real sense of Palmeri's business style when he became president of the association in 1996.

"Every president models his board meeting style on Joe's because he always ended on time or early," says AICC President Steve Young. [Several years ago AICC chairmen were referred to as presidents.]

"Joe was very astute at sticking with the agenda, but if someone had something to say he would make sure that they would be heard," adds AICC Chairman Lee Shillito, president and chief executive officer of Triad Packaging Inc., Bristol, Tenn.

Palmeri's reputation as a savvy businessman puts him at the top of the list for AICC members seeking advice. Many of the current AICC board members call Palmeri to discuss new ideas.

"He was a mentor of mine," says immediate past AICC Chairman Larry Cooper of C&B Corrugated Containers Inc., Mississauga, Ontario. "He is a real fundamental businessman who knows how to be a gentleman and is very professional."

Members, however, like to poke fun at Palmeri's dress code. "Joe would wear a shirt, tie, jacket, and socks to the beach before he would put a pair of shorts on," Cooper jokes.

Young adds, "Dick Troll [former AICC executive director who died

In many ways, Palmeri helped independent converters raise the bar on professionalism and quality at their own plants. Since 1988 Jamestown Container has been practicing the management philosophy of Dr. W. Edwards Deming.

Jamestown Container was featured in a *Paperboard Packaging* magazine cover story in December 1991. In the article, Palmeri says he remembers considering a change around 1980 when he saw a show on television called, "If Japan Can, Why Can't We?" A few years later he decided there had to be a better, more efficient way of making a box so he contacted The Hertz Group, a Miami-based consultant that specializes in the Deming Philosophy, founded by Dr. Paul Hertz.

"People can buy new equipment like we buy new equipment, and they can have nice looking plants, but you need to do something internally because it's the people who really drive the company," he said in the 1991 article.

Palmeri introduced Total Quality Management (TQM) to AICC members in the early '90s after Jamestown Container had initiated the program.

"We used the consultant that Joe was using at the time — The Hertz Group," Young says. "Through that we put on a series of seminars around the country on total quality. Joe and his son, Joe M., would go to regional meetings and speak. He was never afraid to share what he had learned with other members."

Jamestown Container's early pursuit of quality helped the company in 1994 become the first corrugated box plant in the world to receive



In 1997, AICC and TAPPI leadership announced SuperCorrExpo® 2000. Standing, from left, are TAPPI Executive Director Wayne Gross, and Steve Young, AICC executive vice president. Seated, from left, are TAPPI President Dale Dill and AICC President Joseph R. Palmeri.

Q-S 9000 certification. In fact, Jamestown Container is referenced in the book "Q-S 9000 Pioneers," published by McGraw Hill.

Quality wasn't the only area where Palmeri stepped in to help other plant owners and managers. His continued and active involvement sparked many new ideas and programs, including a set-aside agreement with Packaging Corp. of America (PCA), an AICC long-range plan and the first SuperCorr-Expo® in 2000, a machinery show that takes place every four years and is co-sponsored by AICC and TAPPI's Corrugated Packaging Division.

In 1994, Palmeri was AICC chairman of the Containerboard Committee. He worked with Jerry Greeter at PCA to develop a model set-aside. "PCA was very generous in the set-aside they agreed to," Young says. "We used that as a model for all other companies at the time."

Palmeri is a firm believer in having a plan for just about everything. AICC's long-range plan laid the foundation for SuperCorrExpo and sparked partnerships not only with TAPPI but also with the Fibre Box Association (FBA). Palmeri serves on the FBA board.

As such, these three associations have joined forces to offer training programs, conferences and meetings.

"Associations today are no different than a box company," Palmeri says. "You've got to look at where your costs are and how you can drive some costs out of it and one of the ways is developing new programs which is very expensive. I believe in strong alliances."

Jamestown Container has partnerships with folding carton companies for high-graphics jobs and other corrugated plants. The company is part owner with Southern Container, Schiffenhaus Packaging and TenCorr Packaging of Solvay Paperboard, a linerboard and medium mill near Syracuse, N.Y. It also is a member of Packaging Alliance Network (PAN). Modeled after AICC's FirstPak program, PAN offers independent plants the opportunity to join forces and collectively bid for jobs that usually go to larger national companies.

Palmeri believes it's becoming more difficult to operate as an independent company if you don't find new ways to work with people, form alliances and share services.

"You just can't afford to do all these things yourself, and more independents are realizing that," Palmeri says. "A good case in point is independents getting together and putting together a corrugator. I think you're going to see that some day on flexos and high-graphics printing equipment."

Turning A Job Into A Career

Corrugated wasn't exactly the career Palmeri had in mind for himself.

He started working at Jamestown Container in 1956, the same year Glenn Janowsky founded the company. Fresh out of high school, Palmeri was attending community college at night. "I thought I was going to be a history teacher but it never worked out. I've been busy running box plants," he says.

In 1957, he married his wife, Helen. They have a flat tire to thank for their relationship.

"He was driving and he got a flat tire. He stopped at a store and I happened to be in there," she says. "We didn't know each other even though we went to the same school. We just said hi. He said he was with a friend and his car broke down. Later he looked me up in school."

Chances are, anyone who has attended an AICC meeting has met Helen. She travels with Palmeri to every meeting and has played a very supportive and pivotal role in his career.

She's a good sport about all of the time her husband has invested in his career.

"He has been married to [his job] about a year longer than me," she says.

Palmeri became the production manager at Jamestown Container in

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—J. WERTHEIMER,
 PRESIDENT,
 WERTHEIMER BOX

1958 and moved up the ladder to plant manager, and then vice president. In the early '70s he began actively running the company.

Working his way up from an entry level position in a sheet plant has endeared him to many in the industry.

Ackerman says Palmeri is a role model. "He started from a very modest background and Joe did it all on his own. He started working on the machines in the plant and now he's coo of the whole company."

Over the years Jamestown Container has acquired several box plants in New York and Ohio. Palmeri was involved in all of the acquisitions.

He says he owes his involvement in AICC to Janowsky. "He allowed me to attend all the meetings and he has always been supportive of that. You can't do those things without a partner who allows you to do those things," he says.

Janowsky and Palmeri were among 26 finalists for the 1997 Upstate New York Entrepreneur of the Year Award.

Two of the Palmeri's three children, Joe M. and Kimberly, are also involved in the business. Joe runs the company's Cleveland plant and Kimberly is the regional sourcing coordinator at the Falconer facility. Their daughter, Jodi, is a registered nurse in Rochester, N.Y. Helen and Joe have seven grandchildren, ranging in age from nine to 20.

Joe M., who has a master's degree in packaging from the Rochester Institute of Technology, says his father never pushed him into the business. Growing up, he could see how much his father liked it.

He says he tries to emulate his father's drive and dedication. "He has always enjoyed it [the business]. I don't think he ever considered it work. Every day he's ready to do it again."

What's A Letterpress?

Looking back on his nearly 50 years of experience in a box plant, Joe Palmeri, vice president and chief operating officer of Jamestown Container Corp., Falconer, N.Y., says one of the biggest changes in the corrugated industry is the equipment.

"When I started in '56, I started in the plant. I learned to run all the equipment like the old letterpress Langston presses and names you've never heard of," he says. "What has changed, today when I walk out in the plant it's all flexos electronically set up, it's a lot more complicated, yet there's so many things that are the same."

"I'd say the biggest changes are advancements in the equipment and the willingness of a lot of box guys to work together," he continues. "There are so many different ways that we run our business today, through our process improvement and how we change our machine centers and sales compensation programs."

Palmeri also acknowledges that the path to get to a position like his is a lot harder today. "Everybody's looking for MBAs," he says, adding that owners and managers have to constantly be on the lookout for new ways to make and deliver a box.

"It's an industry that you've got to continue to be innovative. If you stay with the old ideas, the old machines and the old thought processes, you could be in trouble."

No Regrets

Even though corrugated wasn't his first choice, Joe Palmeri says he wouldn't change a thing.

"I love this industry. I do have a passion for it. I wouldn't do anything different. It's a wonderful industry," he says.

A former president and member of the Optimist Club, Palmeri always manages to see the positive. "As much as we all complain about what goes on, we're all still here, we're still doing our thing. It's a great industry. I highly recommend it."

That's not just lip service. He continues to be involved in AICC.

"He [is still involved] for two reasons, because he really loves it, and because whoever gets elected to the office of president won't let him [not be involved]," Ackerman says. "People are always leaning on Joe. Whatever it is where somebody needs help, they know they can always ask Joe. He has a very hard time saying, 'No I can't do it.'"

Helen says her husband has no plans to retire. "When somebody asks Joe when he's going to retire, he says, 'I'm still having too much fun.'"

Regarding AICC she says, "AICC is a wonderful organization and we met so many wonderful people. It's the heart and soul of Joe. He loves the AICC." **PBP**

Hall of Fame Inductees

The AICC/Paperboard Packaging Hall of Fame is an opportunity for the independent corrugated converter to recognize those who have worked tirelessly to support their industry. Criteria includes:

- Significant and enduring contributions to the independent sector of the corrugated packaging industry through active AICC membership;
- Frequent contributor or organizer for AICC presentations, workshops or related events geared to helping independents achieve business success;
- Demonstrating by example, the honoree is widely recognized and highly regarded as a successful independent entrepreneur who takes every opportunity to share expertise and ideas with fellow AICC independent members;
- A doer and an achiever, the honoree has a record of accomplishment that singles this individual out as worthy of AICC's highest honor.

The following individuals have been inducted into the Hall of Fame:

- 1982 — Joseph Schiffenhaus, Schiffenhaus Packaging Corp.
- 1983 — Lawrence I. Falstein, Tri-Pack Corp.
- 1984 — S. Richard Van Horne Sr., Corrugated Supplies Corp.
- 1985 — George B. Arvanigian, Arvco Container Corp.
- 1986 — Hardy Sanders, Bates Container Inc.
- 1987 — J. Richard Troll, AICC
- 1988 — Stanley Jacobson, Alden Corrugated Container Corp.
- 1989 — William C. Akers, Akers Packaging Services Inc.
- 1990 — Jack D. Grollman, Triangle Container Corp.
- 1991 — Paul H. Vishny, Esq., D'Ancona & Pflaum
- 1992 — William Hanan, Bay Cities Container Corp.
- 1993 — Jim Deline, DeLine Box Co.
- 1994 — William Ward Sr., Ward Machinery Co.
- 1995 — Laurence C. Schiffenhaus, Schiffenhaus Packaging Corp.
- 1996 — Richard Sharfstein, Pride Container Corp.
- 1997 — Morton S. Ackerman, M.S. Ackerman & Co. LLP
- 1998 — Richard Eastwood, Central Graphics & Container Group
- 1999 — Robert J. Thacker, Thacker Container Co.
- 2000 — Peter Keady, Viking Container Co.
- 2001 — Robert D. Cravens, The New World Companies
- 2002 — William I. Flinn, Scope Packaging Inc.
- 2003 — James L. Kowall, James L. Kowall Associates
- 2004 — Joseph R. Palmeri