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R&R Celebrates 50 Years With Expansion, Youth

by Len Prazych

Two thousand eighteen is an extra big year for Bristol, Connecticut based R&R Corrugated Packaging Group. Like the rarified if not dwindling group of fiercely independent box makers who have been around long enough to tell the story of their decade's long success — several of which have been documented in the pages of *Board Converting News* this year alone — the company is celebrating its 50th anniversary. It also marks the year that second-generation owner and president of R&R, Bob Braverman, hired his oldest daughter, Lauren Braverman, as the Sales Manager, thus putting into place the first phase of a succession plan destined to succeed by following her father's — and her grandfather's — formula for success.

"We have not changed anything we've done in 50 years, as far as servicing our customers correctly goes," says Bob Braverman. "And we haven't changed our identity. We know who we are, we know what we do well, and we stay in our niche."

Braverman cites the many other companies in the competitive Northeast states of New York, New Jersey

and Connecticut that have gone out of business because they "forgot who they were," and took on the wrong type of business, in some cases buying new, expensive equipment only to feed it with low-paying work to justify the purchase, thus disrupting the core

business on which they were already successful.

"I think it's important that you don't change your core business, but instead expand on it," says Braverman, citing the core reason that the business started by his parents, Richard and Margaret Braverman, in 1968 is still, half a century later, prospering, with plans for expansion in place.

R&R had its humble

beginnings in Waterbury, Connecticut, where Richard was a production person — he bought an old Hooper box press, a taper and a stitcher and figured out how to make a box — and Margaret did the books and answered the phones. The company had three employees and operated out of a 20,000-square-foot plant.

Next Day Service

"My father, Richard, prided himself on delivering excellent service," recalls Bob Braverman. "But in the



Bob Braverman, President of R&R Corrugated Packaging Group, with his daughter, Lauren Braverman, R&R's Sales Manager, who joined the company this year.

1970s, there wasn't a sheet plant in the area that provided next day service. Richard's philosophy was to 'give customers what they want,' and what they wanted was next day service. So that's what he did."



One of two Isowa heavy-duty corrugators at NewCorr Packaging in Northborough, Massachusetts, which provides several grades of board to R&R and other box makers in the Northeast.

Providing such service also meant having a reliable sheet supplier, but in the 1970s and 80s, acquiring a constant and quality supply of sheets was quite grueling. Therefore, in 1989 R&R became a founding partner in NewCorr Packaging Group, which is a sheet feeder that changed R&R's business for the better by allowing it to further expand the excellent service it was already providing.

"NewCorr is a big part of who we are," says Braverman. "We could never justify a corrugator, which is why we invested in NewCorr. It's one of the best decisions that we have ever made. We can buy any grade that we need and receive our sheets first thing in the morning, which allows us to turn an order around expeditiously, in many cases the very same day. This allows R&R to 'out service' almost every competitor in the greater area."

R&R's business in "filling its niche" grew significantly and in 2001, the company moved to its current 208,000-square-foot facility in Bristol, which is within 80-90 miles of R&R's customer base, which represents virtually every market segment and industry. According to Braverman, only one customer represents more than one percent of the company's sales. "Having one customer that represents 30, 40 or even 50 percent of your business allows them to dictate what you do," he says. "That one customer can control you. I've seen too many box plants and other types of businesses get into trouble because one customer represents too much of their business and then decides to change the rules of the game." Thus, R&R produces a high volume of orders daily. R&R can also produce many stitch boxes and double wall boxes, whereas

many other box businesses in its geographical area will not. In addition, R&R "farms out" one-third of its business to local integrated businesses.

Equipment Is Key

The key piece of equipment that has allowed R&R to expand its core business is its Alliance J&L 170-inch specialty folder gluer. "We installed it four years ago and it's one of the biggest and best things we've ever done," says Braverman. "When we were researching equipment and trying to decide on what size machine to buy, I wanted the biggest because, not coincidentally, we do a lot of big box business. Boxes come off our 66-inch by 190-inch McKinley and go right to the J&L for gluing. Most importantly, the J&L operates at accelerated speeds. It runs over 20,000 pieces per hour and it serves a lot of different purposes. For example, it has allowed us to run boxes 5-inches by 5-inches by 50-inches and ship them the next day."

R&R has two Curioni mini 28-inch by 80-inch flexos running side by side and recently added a diecut section to one. The company also runs a Curioni 50-inch by 120-inch flexo with diecut section and a recently-added Sun lead edge feeder. R&R's two-color 66-inch by 80-inch Hycorr is, according to Braverman, a "great machine." And R&R just purchased an Iton stitcher, which now gives it three stitchers, very unusual for a box maker but not one for whom stitching is another niche business. Braverman is currently looking at purchasing yet another. "We have a tremendous amount of stitch box business we have to be able to service," he says. "We had an order for 8,000 stitch boxes that was placed on Tuesday and delivered on Thursday. We ran two stitchers at the same time to fill the order."

R&R is still seeking to expand, but only if it creates opportunities for the company to grow while making money on one of its niche businesses. Braverman acknowledges he is looking to invest in a 4-color process printer/diecutter and possibly, a digital printer in the not too distant future. "We're not only looking to produce more boxes within our niche business, but we're also looking to expand our business in the digital printing realm as well," he says.

Next Generation

R&R runs two shifts and has many employees who have been with the company for over 30 years. It also has a very experienced sales staff, five of whom have been with the company for 25 years or longer. R&R has three full-time designers, another strength in a company whose stock in trade is next day service. If a salesperson gets an order or quotation for a new job, one of the R&R designers will provide a sample the very same day. In most cases, R&R will have a complete sample back to the customer the next morning and deliver the finished product the following day.

"We have wonderful employees," boasts Braverman. "There isn't anything I would not do for my employees, and there isn't anything they wouldn't do for me. I am a very happy man because ultimately, that is what I believe business is all about and one of the reasons I am so excited to have my daughter, Lauren, be the next generation to carry on the family business."



The versatile Alliance J&L 170-inch specialty folder gluer gives R&R the ability to satisfy a variety of customers with next day service.

Although Braverman has no plans to leave the helm at R&R just yet — he's a "young 55" and feels like he has another 10 years in him — a succession plan is in place with Lauren Braverman, who graduated from Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut, this past May. Lauren has worked at R&R full time each summer since her senior year of high school and worked part time her entire senior year of college to maintain the multitude of customers she gained.

Lauren is now the Sales Manager working on the road every day meeting with customers. "I've wanted to be in the box business since I was a young child, when my father would each year have my elementary school class come to the facility for a tour," says Lauren. "One memory that I will always remember fondly was in the third grade. My father built an incredible large-scale box maze for my elementary school's spring carnival. All of my classmates were in disbelief and amazed that my father made that happen." Lauren also stated, "I can vividly remember feeling enormously proud that my dad's job was unique. There aren't many people who can say 'my dad makes boxes for a living!' I tell everyone that boxes are in my blood and I've always been interested in our family business."

It certainly didn't hurt a proud father's chances of getting his daughter to join the business if he was excited about what he did for a living, excited enough to bring boxes and samples home with him and share his box making adventures with his family during dinner table conversations.

Some "next generation" employees are required to

interview for their position. Lauren was no different. "She passed the interview," Bob Braverman says proudly, adding that Lauren excelled in sales right away during her summer work at R&R, and at a local retail corporation. "She's a natural salesperson," Bob says.

"Selling is second nature to me because I loved what I was selling," says Lauren, sounding a lot like her father, having watched and listened to him closing sales since she was a child. "I think I'm good at building relationships while making a personal connection, which is important to both me and all of my customers. Right now, I'm helping myself and our sales team find new areas and industries to sell to."



R&R has two Curioni mini 28-inch by 80-inch flexos running side by side and recently added a diecut section to one.

Lauren has spent time on the production floor getting familiar with the equipment and has done several time studies. These time studies make processes more efficient, and it expedites orders while making them less expensive than they were before.

"Our customers are always amazed when we inform them that their orders will arrive the next day, while being at the price they are most comfortable with," she says. "It's because of the relationships we've built with our suppliers, our vendors and our employees. And if a customer has a new product that has not yet been introduced to the market, they're excited to know that we can design a completely customized box that will protect and market their product. They are thrilled to have boxes designed to fit their needs."

Ripe For Acquisition?

R&R corrugated is a well-run, profitable company with an excellent business model, experienced long-term employees and now, a succession plan. So why hasn't it been acquired?

"We get calls all the time from people wanting to buy us, but I believe that there's nothing better than having your family with you and having your kids work with you," says Braverman. "I enjoyed working with my father and I'm happy that both of my daughters — my youngest is joining us in two years — want to

work for me, too. I enjoy what I do and enjoy being with my kids. I want our family to stay close and I believe a family business keeps a family close. To me that's more important than anything."



R&R's Bob Braverman says his 66-inch by 80-inch Hycorr diecutter is "a great machine."

On another note, about ten years ago, Braverman converted his large Bristol facility into multiple commercial units through large scale building projects. Braverman now has three other businesses operating out of his 208,000-square-foot building. He has other commercial and residential realty, which are managed by his other business, Braverman Bristol. He states,

"Realty has always been an interest, and on any given day, I am actively looking for more commercial buildings to purchase. Lauren oversees and tends to all tenants. She creates electric and rent bills and visits our tenants on a monthly basis."

"I'm overjoyed to have my daughter present in my company and I look forward to the many years ahead that we can work alongside one another." Braverman



R&R's Braverman has three other businesses operating out of his 208,000-square-foot facility in Bristol, Connecticut.

has serviced his niche and expanded his core business by knowing who he and his company is. "It's not about me retiring because I could do that tomorrow. It's more about making sure that what we've built is growing and making sure we're taking care of the people who have been with us forever. I think that's important."