



**Tom Orkisz**  
Chairman and CEO

## **A Family Affair**

Inline recently celebrated their 55-year anniversary. Celebrating that milestone while ownership of the company has remained all within one family, is rare. Founded by Rudolph and Gene Orkisz in 1958, Tom Orkisz took over ownership and control of Inline Plastics in 1999 and remains at the helm of this rapidly growing company today.

Inline Plastics fills many of Tom's childhood memories. From visiting the factory after church each Sunday and riding hand trucks with his siblings, to actually "working" on the weekends doing janitorial and handyman projects, Inline Plastics has always been a big part of Tom's life.

During those teen years, while his father Rudy spent much of his time travelling and growing the business, Tom remained at home and involved with the local operations. "I started as a utility, then did shipping and receiving, warehouse management, then transitioned to doing set-ups on the production machines," Tom explained. "Much of what I learned at that young age came from working directly with the employees." Some of these key mentors are still employed at Inline today. "While my father was chasing a new piece of business or a new market, I was learning the day-to-day details of running the plants."

Subsequently, Tom graduated from college and spent eight years working outside the company as a mechanical engineer. He returned to Inline in 1991 as a Project Engineer and by 1997 he was managing the operations with his brother and father. The unexpected passing of Tom's father resulted in a turbulent few year. When his brother decided to retire from the business, Tom initiated a leveraged buy-out of the rest of the family to take over sole control and move forward with Inline Plastics under his leadership. In 2018, his daughter Alicia Orkisz Fitze, joined the organization as General Council.

## **A Young President**

His transition to president occurred when Tom was just 37 years old. One of his first endeavors was establishing a formal Board of Directors. John Starr, who remains a valued board member today, introduced Tom to the Young Presidents' Organization (YPO). Participation with this community, Tom attributes much of his growth and development as a business leader. "YPO gave me unique access to consultants and subject matter experts on a local, national and international level that have been excellent resources in my growth and development as a chief executive," Tom explained.

It was through his father's example, however, that Tom accredits learning that as a leader, he needs to "Not be afraid to take risks. Think big picture and then surround myself with great people to handle the day-to-day details."

## **Focused on Innovation**

It was in the early 2000's, shortly after stepping into the president's shoes, that Tom initiated a task force directed to target the fresh-cut-fruit and general agriculture packaging business. Part of that internal

team was directed at finding a solution for the long sought-after market need for tamper evident and tamper resistant packaging. In 2006, after years of hard work, the patented Safe-T-Fresh® was introduced as the industry's first tear-strip, tamper evident packaging container. "It took a couple of years to gain traction, but since then, it has seen double digit growth each year and we are still enjoying a dominant market share position. Today, Safe-T-Fresh accounts for over half of our total business!" Known for their innovation, in 2022 Inline Plastics integrated this patented technology to create the first tamper evident, tamper resistant, all-clear polypropylene product family for hot food applications, called Safe-T-Chef®.

Inline continues to maintain a reputation as a product leader and innovator within the thermoforming industry, realizing almost 300% growth in the last decade alone. "My father would be amazed at what Inline has grown into."

### **Lessons Learned**

To be a successful leader requires the ability to look back, evaluate past strategies, and apply those lessons learned to future planning. With that hindsight, Tom reflects, "I wish I would have brought Operational Excellence into the organization sooner." The current OpEx agenda has fueled increased efficiencies, product development, and improved the quality of new and existing product lines. "I also would have invested more into our Human Resources department. And most significantly, I would have thought bigger when sighting new plants and facilities, acquiring adjacent buildings or land. We have outgrown space at every plant!"

### **Future Forecast**

"I see no reason why Inline cannot achieve over a billion dollars in sales with a global presence in the decades to come," Tom projects. As the company continues to grow, he foresees the need for at least one more U.S.-based plant before reaching out into international markets.

Harkening back to his heritage, Tom also hopes to maintain the Orkisz family's presence at Inline Plastics. "I'm hoping some new Orkisz's will be in the game" in the years to come. Until then, this company is moving forward under Tom's leadership and continuing to transform the food packaging industry with its innovation and product leadership business model.