

History of Inline Plastics

A history of strong leadership, innovation, adaptability, and commitment to continuous improvement is necessary for a company to enter its fifty-fifth year in business. As Inline Plastics celebrates, it does so knowing that those virtues are what has sustained it through the decades and subsequently prepare it for another century of growth and success.

Founding

It all began with two immigrant brothers from Poland working in a local foundry in Bridgeport. And as almost every successful entrepreneur has done, they recognized an opportunity and a way to do something better. That something was the emergence of a new industry producing plastic parts via a vacuum forming process (thermoforming), and the need for patterns and molds for the machines.

Rudolph and Gene Orkisz thus founded the R&G Mold & Pattern Company in the basement of their home. Through the 1960s the brothers grew the business and in 1968 they moved into a dedicated facility in Bridgeport.

Birth of Inline Plastics

From 1968 and through the 1970s, the company expanded beyond simply making molds for other manufacturers. Rudy and Gene purchased their own thermoforming machine and began producing the finished plastic products themselves. This separate endeavor was named Inline Plastics Corp. As more thermoforming and pressure-forming machines were purchased, multiple moves to larger facilities were required. And by the early 1980s, the tooling demands for Inline Plastics were occupying 100% of the resources of R&G Mold. At that point, the decision was made to cease creating molds for other companies, retire the R&G name, and bring all tooling and mold-making operations under the banner of Inline Plastics.

Transition of Ownership

Rudy took over sole control of the company after Gene's passing in the 1970s. Through the following decades, ownership of the company remained completely within the Orkisz family. Rudy's son, Tom, stepped into the position of president in the late 1990s and oversaw the company's emergence into the next millennium with a focus on innovation, consumer safety, and environmental responsibility. Tom Orkisz still serves today as the Chairman, CEO, and owner of Inline Plastics, leading this family-owned business into the next century of prosperity.

Growing Beyond Connecticut

The success and rapid growth of Inline Plastics required multiple moves to larger facilities around Bridgeport. The acquisition of a warehouse and an additional manufacturing facility in Shelton occurred in the 1990s. This facility is still the current headquarters and primary production plant for the company today. At the same time, Rudy began exporting to his native country and opened Inline Poland. One of the original corporate buildings located in Milford became a dedicated R&D facility. An additional Distribution Center was added in Shelton in 2001. And to manage customer supply needs across

North America, new manufacturing facilities were opened in Salt Lake City, UT (2004) to serve the western states, McDonough, GA (2010) to serve the southern states, Conyers, GA (2021) to manufacture the polypropylene product line, Safe-T-Chef®, and Gladwin, MI (2022) focused on production of the Platter product line.

History of Innovation

The company's first significant contract was the production of plastic fire hats. Through the years, they also made silly putty packages and blister packs. It was in the 1980s that Inline Plastics ventured into food packaging and the real game-changers occurred.

The SureLock® food packaging line, designed for bakery and food service markets, was the first big innovation to come from Inline Plastics. This was followed by the introduction of the Automatic Locking Device (ALD), which was the first clamshell packaging automation component, and the eventual release of the double-line locks, which are the current industry standard for clamshell locking systems.

But it was an industry disrupter called Safe-T-Fresh® that catapulted the company to new levels of growth. In 2005, Inline Plastics released the very first tamper-evident, tamper-resistant container with a patented tear-strip hinge that the consumer removes to gain access to the contents. This zipper-pull technology revolutionized the food packaging industry in multiple ways. First, it eliminated the need for costly shrink- or wrap-around paper bands. Second, those opaque wrappers concealed the contents. Their removal allowed for a clearer, unobstructed view of the contents by consumers. And lastly, it provided a visible assurance of product safety.

The launch of Safe-T-Fresh® was a crucial turning point in the history of Inline Plastics. It was at this point that the small, growing, successful family business turned the corner to become a recognizable leader in the food packaging industry.

Inline's commitment to innovation is as strong as it has ever been. In the past decade, the company has released a variety of new packaging products, specifically targeted to the growing needs and demands of its customers. The innovation of each new product takes into consideration versatility, enhanced merchandising, leak-resistance, increased shelf-life, product protection, and consumer safety. Take for example the recent launch of Safe-T-Chef®. In 2022, Inline entered the food service market with their patented tamper protection technology offering the first tamper evident, tamper resistant polypropylene product family for hot food applications.

Environmentally Conscious

Part of Inline's commitment to innovation includes an awareness and responsibility towards the environment. In 2009, the company converted all product lines to DPET™ material, which has a low carbon footprint and is 100% recyclable. The Direct-to-Sheet PET (DPET™) decreases manufacturing energy consumption, reduces waste, and is accepted by curbside recycling bins. In 2020, Inline announced that all PET products would contain 10% post-consumer with the launch of Reborn, being the first thermoformer of rigid food packaging to use post-consumer made from recycling at the molecular level – known as Advanced Recycling.

100% of Inline's trim waste is ground and converted into recycled PET (RPET). This is the highest clarity RPET in the market and has the lowest carbon footprint compared to its post-consumer rivals.

Additionally, in 2018, more than 2500 solar panels were installed on the rooftop of the Shelton plant. These solar panels generate 1.2 million kWh of electric power annually, supplementing almost 15% of the energy needed for the facility.

In early 2024, Inline Plastics received certification for the company's claim that all their PET products are 'Made with 10% Post-Consumer Recycled PET' from SCS Global Services (SCS), a global leader in sustainability standards and third-party verifications. To achieve certification, SCS conducted an independent third-party audit of the organization and the product(s) with recycled content. The audit checked manufacturing data, processes, chain of custody procedures, material quantification, and mass-balance calculations to determine conformance to the SCS Recycled Content Standard. As part of this certification, Inline Plastics Essentials® and Safe-T-Fresh® product lines are now included in the SCS Green Products Guide, an online directory for SCS certified green products.

Continuing their dedication to their sustainability efforts, Inline Plastics pre-qualified all their products with the How2Recycle® labeling system. This is a significant milestone that will help processors and retailers properly label packaged fresh foods. The How2Recycle label is a standardized labeling system that clearly communicates disposal instructions to the public. The pre-qualification process helps vet packages for brands, ensuring the recyclability of structures can change due to various factors. Companies must be active How2Recycle members to utilize the label on their packaging.

Inline Plastics is proud to be part of over 500 brand owners and retailers who are members of How2Recycle, and tens of thousands of products that carry the How2Recycle label in the marketplace.

Moving Forward

Recent years have witnessed a deepening dedication to driving innovation within the food packaging marketplace. Significant investments have been made to expand market penetration and do so by anticipating consumer wants and needs, then offering packaging solutions that meet and exceed them. This includes offering customers a comprehensive packaging solution with access to customized packaging automation equipment, and operating manufacturing facilities that are recognized for their production and food safety excellence.

As the company looks back on its fifty-five years of history, it does so with a discerning eye. One that appreciates the stability and long-standing community impact of its organization, learns from the lessons of past successes and failures, and commits to a future of continuous improvement, that will ultimately result in sustained growth and profitability.