

## Steadfast leader listens first

### Mechanical Rubber CEO Cedric Glasper named 2021 *Rubber News* Executive of the Year

By Andrew Schunk  
Rubber News Staff

STRONGSVILLE, Ohio—In any company, employees need the proper tools to complete the job, a lesson that Mechanical Rubber Co. Inc. CEO Cedric Glasper learned while growing up in Hazelwood, Mo.

Glasper, 54, has been named the 2021 *Rubber News* Executive of the Year, and his selection is due in large part to that quality and others gleaned throughout his life, beginning in the 25,000-person suburb that sits just northwest of St. Louis.

From the 80,000-sq.-ft. Mechanical Rubber manufacturing campus in Strongsville, Ohio, just west of Cleveland, Glasper recalled assisting his father, Ted, a UPS driver, as the two tinkered away under the hood of the family car.

"My father loved working on cars. I was holding the flashlight and he asked me to hand him a precision screwdriver, and that is not what I gave him," Glasper told *Rubber News*. "He immediately said, 'I need the right tools for the right job!'"

"And that stuck with me. My people can't succeed if I don't give them the right tools to succeed."

Those people include the 14 or so Mechanical Rubber employees at the Strongsville facility, as well as the 18 (or so) employees at the 54,000-sq.-ft. Warwick, N.Y., campus, where the seals, gaskets and custom contract company has been based since 1941.

While Glasper may not be doling out hand tools to workers, he is passing along his values, including hard work, diligence, independence and integrity—and those are just a few that were cited by his colleagues and employees.

Glasper also is quick to embrace the uncomfortable—often couched in the unknown—for the sake of personal and professional growth.

"There are two types of change," Glasper said. "Change that happens to you and change that you make happen. Moving to different neighborhoods all my life, you have to adapt and communicate with all types of people. This really helped me in

my professional life, as it did my two siblings as well—they also learned this.

"We talk to everyone and we are not one-sided in our communications."

Glasper said he likes to run a "flat organization," and prides himself on being approachable while ensuring his employees at all levels communicate clearly with each other.

"It's exactly why I don't like (the term) managers—I need leaders," he said. "I look at it as a wagon wheel—there are spokes and there is the hub, and you can be one or the other. This is what I try to teach to new hires."

The traits that Glasper has imparted to both tenured workers and new hires alike are not lost on them.

Alisa Sherow, who has worked at Mechanical

See **Glasper**, page 21



Cedric Glasper learned many of his leadership skills from his parents.

Rubber News  
*Executive of the Year*

## M&A surge rounds out busy 2021



Get the scoop on the latest industry acquisitions on pages 4, 5, 6, 7 and 9.

By Erin Pustay Beaven  
Rubber News Staff

Deals happen when the right pieces—and right price tags—fall into place. And as 2021 comes to a close, it looks as though the pieces and prices are coming together for a quite a few companies.

A flurry of mergers and acquisitions have been reported by rubber industry companies in recent weeks, and, according to a pair of economic experts, it's likely to continue through the end of the year.

Bill Wood, founder of Greenfield, Mass.-based Mountaintop Economics & Research Inc., cautions against looking too deeply into trends behind the M&As and making too many connections to the COVID-19 pandemic. Sometimes, the uptick in M&A activity is just that, an uptick.

"What is causing all the M&As? The fact that there is a lot of M&As," Wood said. "It can be a self-fulfilling prophecy."

And that could be the case right now as favorable market trends and an influx of capital influence buying and selling decisions. It's all part of an economic cycle that creates ideal moments for M&A.

"Money and access to money at the present time is cheap, and access is relatively easy," Wood said. "If you have leverage, you can go out and borrow money at relatively low rates, and by that, I mean

the interest rates, as we know, are low.

"And what are you going to do with the money? ... You can invest in new equipment or you can invest in buying a whole factory, buying the whole shop. Because if you have cash, and a lot of people do have a lot of cash—there is no shortage of capital in the country—you can't put it in the bank and make anything," Wood said.

"The stock market is pretty high, you can't buy back your own stock a lot of times anymore, they have done that. And multiples are really pretty high on the market, so if a guy is selling his company, you are going to look hard at it. ... All of these financial and economic things point to the idea that now is an auspicious time to make a deal."

All considered, it's tough to say that the COVID-19 pandemic and the effects it has on global business—and the rubber industry, specifically—is playing the key role in the recent surge of M&A activity, Wood said. He believes that factors traditionally influencing buyers and sellers remain steadfast: Companies are looking for

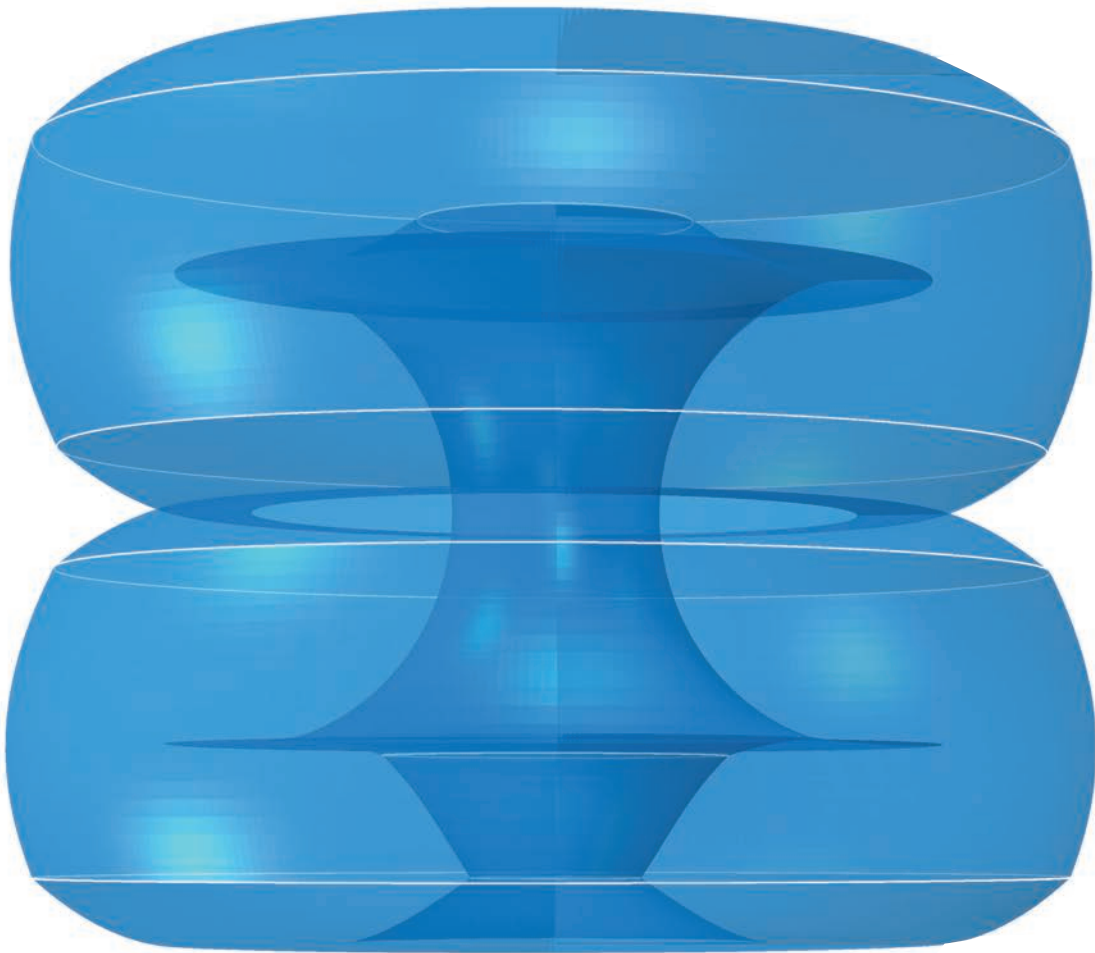
See **M&A**, page 19



Wood

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# Rubber News



## Rubber News plans holiday schedule

Rubber News Staff

CUYAHOGA FALLS, Ohio—This is the last regular print issue of *Rubber News* for 2021.

For our Dec. 27, issue, we will be publishing our second annual edition of “The Book,” designed as a 2021 yearbook and reference tool that will include a variety of facts, figures and other information related to the rubber and tire industries.

The first print edition of 2022 will be published Jan. 24.

During the interim, *Rubber News* will continue to post industry updates on our website at rubbernews.com. We will publish stories weekdays through Dec. 23.

Our staff will take a holiday break Dec. 24 through Jan. 2, resuming operations Jan. 3.

## On the move

*Budzar Industries L.L.C.*—Hired **David F. Young**, former president at Budzar, in the sales division.

*Elkem*—Appointed **Helge Aasen** as CEO.

*Goodyear*—Named **Scott Cole** as vice president of Goodyear Americas Manufacturing. Named **Mike Calabro** vice president of Goodyear Americas Supply Chain.

*International Institute of Synthetic Rubber Producers*—Elected **Larisa Bondar** as 2021-22 president international.

*LabsCubed Inc.*—Hired **Doug Ruch** in the sales division.

*LMI Custom Mixing L.L.C.*—Hired **Celeste Vanfossen** as a junior chemist. Named **Nikki Cook** as environmental, health and safety manager.

*Motion Industries Inc.*—Promoted **John Watwood** as vice president of operations integration.

*Sumitomo Rubber North America*—Named **Darren Thomas** as president and CEO.

*Tire Industry Association*—Named **Dick Gust** as CEO.

*Zeppelin Group*—Appointed **Markus Voegel** as managing director of Zeppelin Systems GmbH.

## Inside this edition



**18** Kim Dempsey-Miller is about to close her year as chair of the ACS Rubber Division, and she looks back on what was a historic term that called for much flexibility.

## In focus



This rendering shows Trim-Lok's planned 150,000-sq.-ft. campus, which will include a manufacturing facility, a warehouse and hub for raw materials.

# Trim-Lok doubling footprint in Elkhart

By Mike McNulty

Rubber News Correspondent

BUENA PARK, Calif.—Trim-Lok Inc. plans to expand its Elkhart, Ind., manufacturing and warehouse operation twofold into a facility that eventually will allow it to increase the size of its work force and capabilities.

A leading producer of thermoplastic and thermoset rubber profile extrusions, the company's new, larger structure will be a state-of-the-art facility that spans 150,000 square feet, more than doubling its present set-up consisting of three buildings: a manufacturing plant, a warehouse and a building used for raw materials and other items, according to Dan Whitener, vice president and chief operating officer.

Located on the eastern border of Elkhart, the new plant also will have an additional 5,500 square feet of office space and feature the latest technologies to support all facets of the business, the company said in a news release.

Trim-Lok's Elkhart facility is one of three operated by the firm. The other two, which together cover a total of 400,000 square feet, are located in Buena Park, where the company is headquartered.

Founded in 1971 and celebrating its 50th anniversary, the firm expects to complete the expansion project by the spring of 2022, a spokeswoman said. The Elkhart border location of the new facility will allow for shorter transit times for raw materials and finished goods, and for better management of freight for both Trim-Lok and its customers, according to the company statement.

In addition, it said shipment times to customers also will be shortened because inventory will be easier to manage in a more central location for customers east of the Rocky Mountains.

Whitener said that the plant's work force—including manufacturing and warehouse jobs as well as office positions—is expected to grow. “We employ 250 people at our West Coast plant and 40 in Indiana,” he noted. “We will increase the size of the Indiana work force, but how many will be determined by demand.”

A variety of new machinery and processes needed to increase

capacity and implement new capabilities will be added at the Elkhart complex, said Marc Maloney, Midwest general manager. He added that, at this time, the firm can't divulge any proprietary information on the additional machines or new advanced technologies earmarked for the Elkhart facility.

“Having manufacturing capabilities in the Midwest is a critical component of our ability to support our customers, especially with the market the way it is currently,” Whitener said. “We have a fairly small, yet resilient work force and set of capabilities in our current 27,000-sq.-ft. (manufacturing) facility. With the expansion, we will be growing not only our physical footprint but our work force and capability set.”

He said that another prime reason behind the expansion is that Trim-Lok is looking to better serve its customers in that part of the country with the expansion. “This pulls everything under one roof. The expansion is to help both long-term customers and new customers, both big and small.”

Trim-Lok is a critical supplier of goods to a wide variety of customers in a wide variety of segments, including defense, food service, aviation, agricultural equipment, medical and numerous other industries, Whitener said. “To a degree, we're recession-proof.”

Even during the COVID-19 pandemic, the company hardly slowed down and kept producing and supplying products for customers, he said.

Maloney added that the firm's business model “has allowed Trim-Lok to supply the largest of original equipment manufacturers to the smallest of end users with the same engineering support and product quality.

“We're definitely stronger now than we've ever been in our 50-year history,” said Whitener, who's been running the firm for the last eight or nine years. “The company was started basically by my dad, Gary, with a single customer and two employees. Today we see ourselves as No. 1 in the industry for what we do.”

In addition to its manufacturing and distribution facilities in the Midwest and West Coast, Trim-Lok has distribution sites in Ireland, Holland, New Zealand, Australia, Iran, Mexico, Japan and at multiple locations in the U.S. and globally.

Since 1971, Trim-Lok has provided rubber and plastic trim and seal parts to customers. It designs parts and tooling and fabricates to exact customer specifications.



Whitener

## Bridgestone selling its tennis goods business

European Rubber Journal

TOKYO—Bridgestone Sport Co. is selling all the stock of Bridgestone Tecnifibre Co. Ltd. to Japanese sports equipment manufacturer Yonex Co. as part of its withdrawal from the tennis goods business.

Based in Chonburi, Thailand, the operation manufactures and sells tennis

balls and had sales of \$15.8 million in 2020, Bridgestone said Dec. 6.

Bridgestone said previously that it planned to exit the tennis goods business at the end of 2020 as part of the ongoing portfolio restructuring of its diversified products business.

The company launched its mid-term business plan (2021-23) in February to

focus on core competencies such as tires and solutions and to “rebuild earning power” through expense and cost structure reform.

“By executing these strategies, Bridgestone is transforming to a ‘strong’ Bridgestone capable of adapting to the changing business environment,” the group said.

## M&A: Year End Selling Spree

# Keeping goods moving

## Rubber Tree Systems buys WarehouseTWO as boost to software offerings

By Bruce Meyer  
Rubber News Staff

TOLEDO, Ohio—With the supply chain issues that have plagued all industries for most of 2021, two software firms geared toward industrial distributors and manufacturers have combined in a deal that may ease those difficulties.

Toledo-based Rubber Tree Systems recently purchased the assets of WarehouseTWO L.L.C., an inventory sharing solutions software firm headquartered in California.

Rubber Tree Systems is known for its sales force mobilization, customer relationship management and analytics/reporting software that integrates with customers' enterprise resource planning systems. The purchase brought "two strong and well-respected companies together," according to Brian Kazmierczak, RTS president and owner.

"We will continue to grow our software solutions, customer base and talented team of employees to serve our over 1,200 combined customers in the distribution and manufacturing markets," he said. "Both Rubber Tree Systems and WarehouseTWO are widely known in the industry for their distribution focus, outstanding customer service and easy-to-use products."

"Our vision includes continuous investment in the software and the people who have made both companies successful over the last 15-plus years."

### What is WarehouseTWO?

In a nutshell, WarehouseTWO offers internet-based inventory sharing software created for manufacturers and their networks of authorized distributors. Members make their inventory data available to other members by uploading it to the software firm's server. Members then can browse available inventory to find items they may need to fill customer orders.

The company was the brainchild of Mark Tomalonis, who was principal and co-owner of WarehouseTWO and remains there in an advisory capacity. He started his career in distribution and later moved to operations. In 2005, he worked for an industrial manufacturer that sold its goods through distribution channels.

At the time, the manufacturer had lead times that were unacceptable, leaving its distributors scrambling for parts. "All those distributors owned piles of parts, but the parts weren't at the right place at the right time," Tomalonis told *Rubber News*. "So the distributor group challenged the manufacturer to come up with a solution."

And Tomalonis volunteered, launching the WarehouseTWO website that year with a simple concept. The software company hosts the database in the cloud, and participants in a manufacturer's distributor network populate the database with its available inventory.

"We allow a manufacturer and its distributors to create one big virtual pile of inventory, with the benefit being that every distributor can now act as if he or she owns all of the inventory in the network," Tomalonis said. "The theory behind it is that if everyone has access to



more inventory, everyone is going to sell more."

While it was created to help one particular manufacturer, it since has grown to provide the service to many more manufacturers and distributors across a myriad of industries.

The site is set up with "communities" based around a specific manufacturer or brand. He said that only certified distributors of that manufacturer can participate in its community, posting both what inventory the distributor has available to sell, along with what other distributors have uploaded.

The WarehouseTWO site has significant participation in the rubber industry, as numerous communities are set up around some of the biggest names in the hose, belting and related markets.

And this is how it works: If one company is trying to fulfill a customer order but it doesn't have something in stock, it can go to WarehouseTWO and see if other distributors have what it needs. So it will buy the product through the site, and then in turn sell it to the end customer.

"WarehouseTWO is merely a matchmaker between buyers and sellers behind the curtain," Tomalonis said. "The end customer typically doesn't even know the product moved from company A to company B. That's invisible to the end customer. All the end customer knows is he got the product when he wanted it."



**"We allow a manufacturer and its distributors to create one big virtual pile of inventory, with the benefit being that every distributor can now act as if he or she owns all of the inventory in the network."**

Mark Tomalonis

He said it's similar to Amazon in that the majority of products sold on Amazon are for products Amazon never owned, with third-party sellers doing the transactions. Where it differs is that WarehouseTWO is committed to the mindset of the manufacturer/distributor sales channel, and end users aren't eligible to be members.

"We are not an open marketplace," Tomalonis said. "We are basically a collection of private clubs, and those private clubs are a manufacturer and its sales channel partners. WarehouseTWO exists to defend and support a manufacturer's sales channel—not to disrupt it."

The manufacturers benefit because the service mitigates the reality that a manufacturer can't ship everything on time. "We make the brand look better to the marketplace by allowing the manu-

facturer's distributors to have access to more of the inventory."

The goods that typically are sold through the site are less common. By selling through WarehouseTWO, the manufacturer can maintain the efficiency of its operations because it doesn't have to change its production schedule to make one or two of something for a rush order.

"If the distributor has access to more of its inventory, it will sell more of its products," Tomalonis said. "The manufactur-



**"My understanding of how distribution and manufacturing works will enable me to illustrate the value WarehouseTWO brings to both channels."**

Ted Henry

er doesn't want the distributor to go find an alternative source. The manufacturer wants the distributor to sell its brand of product, so we help the distributor sell the manufacturer's product, even if the order wasn't placed with the manufacturer on that day."

### First a fan, now an executive

Ted Henry has worked on both the manufacturer and distributor sides of the rubber business during his career. And he remembers clearly how he became a fan of the inventory sharing service.

"I first noticed WarehouseTWO in a distributor role where we had an order that required eight metric fittings that we could not get in time to fill the order," he said. "When we contacted the manufacturer, they gave us two to three other distributors that had that product in stock in their 'community.'"

"We called those distributors, paid a slightly higher price, but we were able to meet the date of the end user," Henry said. "The manufacturer got to keep its product in the marketplace and we kept the order. This was a very critical order. If we hadn't got it, we could have potentially lost the OEM."

He also had a previous relationship with Rubber Tree Systems, and saw the benefit of both firm's services, so he came aboard as president of the WarehouseTWO business when the deal closed July 1. And he definitely sees his background as a plus.

"My understanding of how distribution and manufacturing works will enable me to illustrate the value WarehouseTWO brings to both channels," Henry said.

"I was in a manufacturing capacity

where I made buying decisions, sales and marketing decisions, and I understand a lot of the value that WarehouseTWO can bring to a manufacturer."

He recently did a demonstration designed to show how manufacturers can better leverage existing assets, something he spent a lot of time on when working in manufacturing. "I understand if you can get more visibility with those assets, that's going to help your company gain market share and grow in sales," Henry said.

Likewise, when he worked in distribution, the company had the WarehouseTWO portal open daily, and it helped them fill customer orders quicker. "So I can tell the distributor firsthand what I saw and how it can help them," he said.

### Time to move on

Tomalonis said he had a good run with WarehouseTWO, but that it was time for him to pass the firm onto someone who could take it safely into the future. He had known Kazmierczak for more than a decade, was familiar with what RTS did and thought the two firms would be a great fit.

He sees Rubber Tree and WarehouseTWO as two of many software companies that serve industrial distribution, catering to the same audience but providing different services.

"Rubber Tree and WarehouseTWO didn't compete with each other," Tomalonis said. "The synergy is an overlap of a lot of customers, and it brings a great opportunity for cross-pollination and cross-selling. Rubber Tree has a staff of programmers and software developers who can take the two products and combine the functionality and create even greater value for our clients."

Given today's environment of supply chain issues, he and Henry both said the services of WarehouseTWO can be beneficial.

"We mitigate lead times," Tomalonis said. "If the product is sitting on the shelf somewhere in the channel, we help redirect the distributor to another distributor who has that same product sitting on the shelf. That's the core of what we do."

Henry said the strength of WarehouseTWO is that the inventory availability data can be updated daily. "Typically, manufacturers can look at sales history, but that's old news," he said. "What WarehouseTWO does is give you current news of what is in the community today. It's not necessarily what you sold three months ago. It's closer to real-time visibility on inventory."

He added that they encourage distributors to include a price on what they are looking to sell, because ultimately the service is about speed of execution and allowing users to make a decision quickly.

"A lot of times a distributor will be on the phone with an end user. They don't have the product they need and they are looking at WarehouseTWO to make a decision on pricing and availability," Henry said.

"What you don't want to do is hang up the phone with your end user and tell them you are going to call them back after you check stock. Because once you do that, they're calling somebody else."

**M&A: Year End Selling Spree****Synthos adds Trinseo SR business, focuses on growth**

Rubber News Staff

SCHKOPAU, Germany—Synthos S.A. finalized Dec. 1 the purchase of Trinseo S.A.'s synthetic rubber business.

The acquisition includes manufacturing sites, intellectual property, and research and development facilities, most of which are located in Schkopau. The move brings Synthos' combined annual SR production capacity for ESBR, PBR and SSBR to more than 800,000 metric tons, while enhancing and streamlining its R&D capabilities.

"The Schkopau plant will enable Synthos to utilize the entire range of technologically advanced solution-styrene butadiene rubber, including functionalized styrene-butadiene rubbers used primarily in technologically advanced tires with low rolling resistance ... including tires for electric cars," Synthos CEO Zbigniew Warmuz said in a statement.

About 440 former Trinseo employees join the Synthos team.

Synthos, in a news release issued the day of the closing, said the acquisition positions the company for a more sustainable future, both in terms of its operations and products.

"The acquisition of the Schkopau plant is the largest transaction in the history of our company," Synthos Group owner Michał Solowow, said in a statement. "Synthos will strengthen its position in the global synthetic rubber market by becoming the second-largest manufacturer in this segment. But more importantly, with this transaction, we are acquiring the most advanced product portfolio in the world that addresses a critical ecological need, namely the reduction of CO2 emissions. The portfolio can be fully used in tires for electric vehicles."

As it was working to finalize the Trinseo unit purchase, Synthos adopted a sustainable development strategy that includes goals to move away from coal as an energy source and reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 28 percent by 2028. The sustainability plan also aims to make its products 100 percent sustainable by 2030, before reaching carbon neutrality by 2050.

The Trinseo deal, first disclosed in July, was amended slightly in October. Oswiecim, Poland-based Synthos paid \$402.4 million—down from the original \$449.4 million—in cash in exchange for an equivalent amount (\$47 million) of net working capital to be collected by Trinseo.

Trinseo expects the net cash proceeds from the sale to be about \$400 million after relevant transaction-related costs and taxes are factored in.

In the years following the closing, Synthos expects the Schkopau plant it has acquired to generate an EBITDA of between \$90 million and \$114 million annually.

The Trinseo business acquisition is the largest part of a larger global growth strategy for Synthos, which plans to invest \$1.2 billion in operations by 2025. The company also

has committed to spending \$120.5 million to build a CCGT unit in Oswiecim. And by 2024, Synthos plans to open a butadiene extraction facility in Plock, Poland, that will have an annual capacity of 120,000 metric tons.

Divestment of the SR unit positions Trinseo to better focus on what a company spokeswoman previously called "higher margin, less-cyclical business lines." It will remain a player in the plastics and latex binders arena.

In July, when the planned divestiture was announced, the



Synthos CEO Zbigniew Warmuz

spokeswoman said that Trinseo "believes there are other owners better positioned to grow the synthetic rubber business, potentially ones with backward integration to butadiene and other feedstocks and with global scale, creating more value going forward for investors and additional growth opportunities for employees."

Privately owned Synthos, a manufacturer of synthetic rubber, styrenics, dispersions and adhesives as well as crop protection products, said it operates six sites in Poland, the Czech Republic, France, the

Netherlands and Germany. It employs about 3,660 people.

Berwyn, Pa.-based Trinseo manufactures plastics and latex binders, supporting a range of end markets including automotive, consumer electronics, appliances, medical devices, packaging, footwear, carpet, paper and board, building and construction, and tires. It operates 26 manufacturing sites globally and employs about 3,800.

Trinseo said in November it also is looking to sell its styrenics businesses.

# AZ

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## M&A: Year End Selling Spree

# Strategics, PE firms likely buyers of DuPont, Trinseo assets

By Frank Esposito  
Plastics News

A wide-ranging group of buyers could be attracted to the plastics materials businesses of DuPont Co. and Trinseo.

Both of those businesses were put up for sale last month. DuPont of Wilmington, Del., is selling businesses with annual sales of just over \$4 billion, including its iconic nylon resin unit. Berwyn, Pa.-based Trinseo is selling its styrenics units, including polystyrene resin and feedstocks. Those units had sales of more than \$800 million in 2020, although their sales in the first nine months of 2021 already had exceeded \$1 billion.

"We're going to have a very good process," Trinseo CEO Frank Bozich said on a conference call with stock analysts. "I think we're going to have three types of buyers—strategics in the same value chain, regional players who want exposure to North American and European styrenics markets, and a good number of financial sponsors who are looking to do a roll-up and aggregate assets with high cash-on-cash return.

"I expect us to have a good process with a robust number of participants," he added. DuPont CEO Ed Breen told analysts that he has already fielded inquiries for the plastics business. He added that he hopes to close a sale of the business by the end of 2022.

Potential buyers for the DuPont plastics unit or similar engineering thermoplastics businesses, according to market veteran Robert Eller, "will likely be large

private equity companies who are adept at cost cutting, in contrast to the major chemical companies who would rather spin and pursue more attractive opportunities than cut costs."

Eller, president of consulting firm Robert Eller Associates in Akron, added that private equity companies have emerged as buyers of these units because commoditization "drives prices and profitability down, especially for large companies with high overhead and paths out of commodity-world via specialties."

Materials giant Dow Inc. of Midland, Mich., might be interested in both the DuPont and Trinseo units, according to Phil Karig, managing director of Mathelin Bay Associates in St. Louis. Trinseo was formed in 2010 as a spinoff of several Dow businesses. Dow also briefly was merged with DuPont from 2017-19.

Dow's familiarity with both businesses and the value-added nature of the DuPont business might convince the firm to make an offer, Karig added. He also said that PE firms "could bid up prices for most of these assets."

Asian manufacturer Teijin Ltd. also is likely to buy out DuPont's 50-percent share in plastic films maker DuPont Teijin Films, Karig said. DuPont already had tried to sell its stake in that business twice in three years before the recent announcement.

Global assets are included in the businesses being sold. Trinseo's sale includes its 50-percent ownership of leading North American PS maker Americas Styrenics

L.L.C. AmSty—based in The Woodlands, Texas—is a joint venture between Trinseo and Chevron Phillips Chemical Co.

AmSty does not report annual sales, but the firm's adjusted earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortization for 2020 was \$52 million, down 44 percent versus 2019.

Regarding the sale of Trinseo's stake in AmSty, a CP Chem spokesperson told *Plastics News* that the firm "continually evaluates the best ways to optimize our portfolio of assets. Beyond that, it is not our practice to share details of our business strategy."

AmSty operates five PS resin plants in the U.S., as well as one in Colombia and a styrene monomer unit in St. James, La. According to a Trinseo filing, AmSty uses 55 percent of its styrene capacity internally to make PS resin.

Other Trinseo units covered by the sale are PS units in Belgium, Germany, Hong Kong and Indonesia, and styrene monomer units in Germany and the Netherlands. If Trinseo sells PS and feedstocks, its remaining business units would be latex binders, engineered materials (including acrylic sheet and resins) and base plastics (including ABS and polycarbonate).

Assets included in the DuPont sale are wide-ranging as well. It includes several well-known brands and materials, including Zytel nylon, Crastin polybutylene terephthalate, Rynite high-performance nylon and filaments, Delrin acetal, Vamac and Hytrel elastomers, and Tedlar fluoropolymers.

Tyvek plastic film and Styrofoam ex-

panded PS materials are not included in the sale, a company spokesman said.

"It's important to note that we expect the (sale) process to take several months and conclude by the end of first quarter 2022," he added. "For now, it remains business as usual as we continue to operate our facilities and meet customer needs and our business commitments."

Nylon is a major part of DuPont's history. The firm began commercial production of nylon 6/6 fiber in December 1939, at a newly built plant in Seaford, Del., about 90 miles from company headquarters in Wilmington. DuPont's work on developing nylon was led by Wallace Carothers, a legendary researcher who left the faculty of Harvard University to join DuPont in 1928.

Today, DuPont is a major global producer of specialty chemicals and plastics. The 219-year-old firm posted sales of \$20.4 billion in 2020.

DuPont sites involved in the sale include:

- Zytel nylon sites in Richmond, Va.; Hamm, Germany; and Mechelen, Belgium;
- Tedlar fluoropolymer production in Circleville, Ohio;
- Vamac elastomer production in Orange, Texas;
- Delrin acetal production in Parkersburg, W.Va.;
- DuPont Teijin film sites in Hopewell, Va.; Torrance, Calif.; and Bayport, Texas; and
- Sites compounding several of these materials in Shenzhen and Zhangjiagang, China. The Zhangjiagang site opened in 2020.

# Conti sells Ohio rubber track plant to defense supplier

Tire Business

PLYMOUTH, Mich.—Continental A.G. has sold its rubber track plant in St. Marys, Ohio, to Loc Performance Products Co., a Plymouth-based supplier of military and industrial components.

The transaction, for which no financial details were disclosed, closed Dec. 1, according to Loc Performance.

The St. Marys facility—opened in 1940 by Goodyear—manufactures rubber track products under the Trackman brand for agricultural, construction and defense applications. Goodyear established the business in 1992 at the molded rubber goods plant.

Continental has owned and operated the plant since 2014 through

its purchase of Veyance Technologies Inc., the former Goodyear Engineered Products business.

Continental has pitched the Trackman product range as part of its OTR and farm tire portfolio since reintroducing those products to the North America market in 2016.

The plant spans over 800,000 square feet and employs 450 people, Loc Performance added.

"This acquisition fits like a glove with Loc, bringing more of the military track manufacturing capacity under U.S. ownership," Loc Performance CEO Lou Burr said.

In addition to increasing Loc's military capabilities, the acquisition also expands the company's

commercial portfolio to include the Trackman brand.

Loc Performance provides track systems, mechanical products, fabricated structures and assemblies for both military and industrial applications. The company has been providing track systems to military customers to support the U.S. Army's portfolio of ground combat vehicle systems since 2014.

With the acquisition, Loc said it could now offer its military customers "continuous and band track solutions."

The purchase also expands Loc's manufacturing capabilities by bringing rubber application processes in-house and offers "vertically integrated track production capabilities" to customers.



Workers at ContiTech's St. Marys, Ohio, plant mark the production of the 150,000th rubber track at the plant in 2015.

# Boyd purchase expands rubber, foam, silicone expertise

Rubber News Staff

PLEASANTON, Calif.—Boyd Corp. continues to pick up speed on the acquisition trail, making its second acquisition in just six weeks. Both moves, Boyd said, are part of a strategy to grow its global footprint and deepen its expertise and capabilities across a variety of materials and solutions in the rubber and plastics industries.

With its Dec. 1 acquisition of Nivelles, Belgium-based Grando S.A., Boyd expands its expertise in rubber, foam and plastic polymer sciences, taking on a business that is dedicated to serving the rail and industrial industries.

The move not only diversifies the company's materials portfolio, it deepens Boyd's European roots, allowing it to expand its market presence in France, Italy and Spain as well as Belgium. It also helps to solidify its place in key growth markets such as e-mobility and renewable energy.

"Grando's polymer scientists and con-



Boyd Corp. recently purchased Grando S.A. and Siltec.

verting technologists expand Boyd's elastomer innovation capability while adding capacity and regional service for our European customers," Boyd CEO Doug Britt said in a statement. "We're accelerating our innovation in high-growth markets like e-mobility, renewable energy, battery storage and industrial technology. Addi-

tional expertise and capability from Grando will further accelerate this innovation while expanding regionally."

Boyd's purchase of Grando follows the company's Oct. 20 acquisition of Siltec, a silicone compounding and custom products specialist based in Weiler, Germany.

Boyd did not disclose the terms of either acquisition.

In an October news release detailing the Siltec purchase, Boyd noted that the deal boosts and diversifies its expertise and capabilities across high-growth market segments, particularly those related to e-mobility and data storage.

"Siltec's dedicated team of scientists and technologists enhance Boyd competencies in silicone material science and the medical industry," Britt said. "We'll leverage this expertise to accelerate innovation across Boyd's material portfolio and adjacent high growth markets like industrial technology, e-mobility and cloud data cen-

ter where customers need high temperature resistant and durable solutions."

Siltec's portfolio includes silicone tubing, molded parts, profiles, seals, O-rings, sheeting and assembled products.

The two acquisitions are among three Boyd has made in the last six months. Boyd also purchased Seattle-based GMN, which provides human-machine interface solutions (backlit membranes, sensors and capacitive touch devices); graphic overlays; optical encoders for precision controls; printed critical interface materials for touchscreens; and positive temperature coefficient heaters.

Pleasanton-based Boyd bills itself as "a world-leading innovator of technologies in material science, engineered materials and thermal management that seal, protect, interface with and cool our customers' most critical applications." The company operates more than 40 sites across North America, Asia and Europe.

## M&A: Year End Selling Spree

# SAS expands footprint with Specialty Rubber buy

By Mike Scott

Rubber News Correspondent

HAMMONTON, N.J.—Specialty Rubber Corp. was purchased by SAS Industries in mid-November with the goal of expanding the acquiring company's footprint in the gasket manufacturing sector.

Terms of the acquisition were not disclosed, nor were revenue figures released by SAS Industries, a privately held company that operates a 40,000-sq.-ft. plant in Elizabeth City, N.C., and a 10,000-sq.-ft. location at its corporate headquarters in Manorville, N.Y. However, SAS said it has achieved steady revenue growth of around 30 percent year-over-year since 2017.

Specialty Rubber had reported a 10 percent revenue increase through the first 10 months of 2021 compared to a similar time period in 2020, according to Mitch Steckis, an SAS Industries sales representative.

SAS Industries has been a gasket and seal manufacturer for more than 45 years. It specializes in a range of machinery process-

es, including die-cutting, waterjet cutting, flash cutting, compression molding, liquid injection molding, extruding and vulcanizing. The company's breadth of clients largely operate in industries such as aviation, aerospace, telecommunications and defense.

The ability to expand its operations to a wider target audience and bring on current Specialty Rubber clients appealed most to SAS Industries, Steckis said. SAS uses a wide range of silicones, thermally conductive materials and various other elastomers in its operations. The company prides itself as being a market leader in conductive silicone compound production for EMI/RFI shielding materials.

"(They have a) similar product mix, allowing us to increase our presence in the current industry," Steckis said. He indicated that the acquisition was a logical fit, and that the entire deal "came together from initial discussion to closing in just two months."

There was a good fit in end markets between the two companies as well. Specialty

Rubber has manufactured different off-the-shelf and custom rubber gaskets, as well as other fabricated parts for clients in the aircraft and aerospace, military and health care sectors. The custom-built gaskets range in size from less than one inch to 48 inches, and are made both in one piece and spliced. Like SAS, the company also grew its business in EMI/RFI shielded gaskets.

Additionally, Specialty Rubber manufactures rolls, sheets, strips, molded parts, O-rings, tubing, extrusions, custom profiles, lathe-cut, kiss-cut, waterjet cut, assemblies, kits and prototypes. The family-owned business had just five full-time employees with three planning to retire following the acquisition. None of the owners will be joining SAS Industries in an executive position, Steckis said.

The company's former 5,000-sq.-ft. manufacturing facility in New Jersey has closed with operations relocated to SAS Industries' North Carolina location. "That property was retained by previous ownership and will be sold

or rented to unrelated businesses," Steckis said.

The Specialty Rubber website still is operating, with "a Division of SAS Industries Inc." added to the header. However, the Specialty Rubber brand will be eliminated and will become part of the SAS nomenclature "once the transition of customers is final," Steckis confirmed.

SAS has more than 20 employees and expects to continue its steady growth in the years ahead. The company does see added revenue opportunities organically in the telecommunications, aerospace and defense industries. "And we are always actively looking for the right acquisitions," Steckis said.

The company was founded in 1973 in Wantagh, N.Y., with an initial focus of building gaskets for sewing machines. SAS also specializes in waterjet cutting, and CNC machining and turning for mold making.

"We see the largest growth in the next two to five years coming from new opportunities in more commercialized industries," Steckis said.



## Meteor acquires Creative, saving firm from closure

By Sarah Kominek

Plastics News

BOCKENEM, Germany—Meteor Group has acquired Ohio-based Creative Extruded Products L.L.C., now called Meteor Creative Inc.

The acquisition marks a reversal to Creative Extruded's October decision to close permanently on Dec. 31 after a previously planned sale of the company fell through.

Creative, which makes plastic and rubber moldings for the automotive glass market, "will add key know-how and technology in thermoplastic products, including PVCs, ABS, polycarbonate, TPR, TPV, TPO and others, to Meteor," a Nov. 30 news release said.

The purchase also will reinforce Meteor's "already strong portfolio of EPDM rubber for both dense and sponge materials."

"The acquisition is an important milestone in our long-term strategy to grow in North America and expand our product portfolio," Meteor CEO Robert Roiger said in the release. "(It) will enable us to serve our renowned U.S. customer base with a broader technology focus.

"We are looking forward to working closely with Creative's highly motivated employees and work force on building this successful new chapter for Meteor Creative," he added.

With 2020 sales of about \$180 million, Meteor operates in Germany, the U.S. and Romania.

Some of the group's OEM customers include Daimler, BMW, VW Group, the Stellantis Group and industrial clients such as Schueco.

Meteor was acquired in 2019 by Aequita, a Munich-based investment firm.

## Pexco diversifies with Performance Elastomers deal

By Frank Esposito

Plastics News

JOHNS CREEK, Ga.—Pexco L.L.C. has kept its acquisition streak going by acquiring Performance Elastomers Corp. of Ravenna, Ohio.

PEC makes dense and sponge elastomer products, including both rubber-based and thermoplastic elastomers for recreational vehicle, automotive aftermarket, marine and heavy equipment uses. The firm operates 15 extruders in facilities spanning more than 100,000 square feet, providing secondary and fabrication services as well as in-house

tool and die capabilities.

In a Dec. 1 news release, Pexco CEO Sam Patel said that PEC's competencies "provide an excellent fit with Pexco's long-term commitment to strategic growth through the delivery of superior product and process innovation."

He added that, through the acquisition, Johns Creek-based Pexco looks forward to expanding its silicone and TPE products and broadening its capabilities to include other high performance polymer solutions.

PEC owners Art Bowen and Dave Spears said in the release that joining with Pexco "will only

reinforce our deep commitment to quality, service, and the ongoing development of unique product applications across the many market segments we currently serve."

The deal is Pexco's second of 2021 and its ninth overall since 2018. Most recently, the firm in March acquired Altaflo L.L.C. of Sparta, N.J. Altaflo makes high-performance fluoropolymer and fluoroplastic extrusions for a wide variety of industries. Pexco's recent string of acquisitions has been made under the ownership of private equity firm AEA Investors of New York.

And Pexco is looking for more deals.

"We remain committed to the ongoing, strategic expansion of our capabilities, including the pursuit of key acquisitions that fit our core objectives," Patel said.

Pexco was No. 19 in the most recent *Plastics News* ranking of North American pipe, profile and tubing extruders, with estimated sales of \$250 million. The firm has plants in the U.S. and Mexico extruding and injection molding plastic products for industrial, lighting, traffic safety, fence, filtration and electrical insulation markets.

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## Opinion

# Pickup in M&A activity likely to continue into 2022

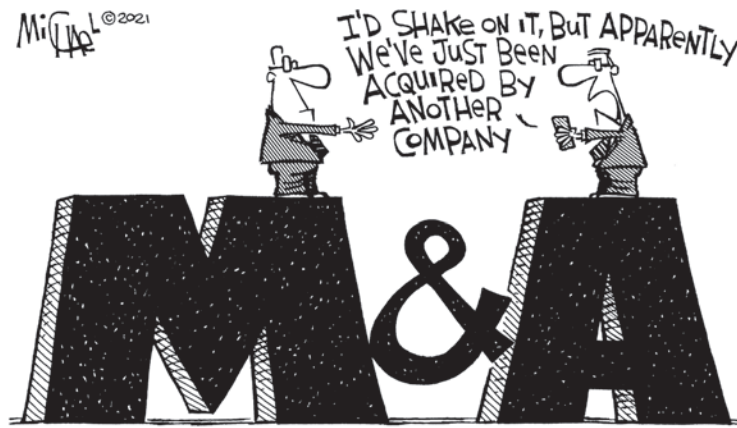
If you've been paying attention lately, you'll notice that the mergers and acquisitions activity picked up significantly in 2021, following a year when it was tough to get a deal done. And as the year draws to a close, the wheeling and dealing has been happening at breakneck speed.

There's been a little something for everyone when it comes to M&A. From mega-deals involving some of the top names in the tire and rubber industry, down to some of the smaller players making strategic purchases or getting an influx of funds by selling to private equity.

For the tire industry, the marquis sale happened earlier in the year, with Goodyear's \$2.5 billion purchase of Cooper Tire & Rubber Co., which helped the Akron-based firm solidify its place as the world's No. 3 tire maker.

Bridgestone Corp. also found a new owner for its Firestone Building Products unit—a top player in the rubber roofing market—in a \$3.4 billion deal that will allow Bridgestone to reinvest in its core tire business. And Denmark's Danfoss finally closed on its purchase of the Eaton Hydraulics business for \$3.3 billion, which brings with it a major hydraulic and industrial hose operation.

There also was serious money changing hands on the supply side of in the industry. Celanese paid \$1.15 billion for ExxonMobil's iconic Santoprene business. DL Chemical bought Kraton for \$2.5 billion, Eastman Chemical sold its tire additives business for \$800 million and DuPont is poised to buy Rogers Corp. in a deal worth



\$5.2 billion.

Economist Bill Wood of Mountaintop Economics & Research Inc. cautioned against making connections between the wave of M&A deals and the COVID-19 pandemic. He said there are favorable market conditions and an influx of capital, two factors that make conditions ripe for acquisitions. He did say the pandemic exposed where companies are vulnerable, allowing leaders to determine which acquisition targets will pay off the most.

Bill Ridenour, of Polymer Transaction Advisors Inc., said tax law uncertainty has been a factor in the number of deals getting done. Any tax increases would bring down acquisition prices as the after-tax proceeds will be less than private equity groups have come to expect.

And if you happen to be looking to sell a company or asset, Ridenour has this projection: there likely will be fewer buyers in the market next year, also leading to lower prices because of the lack of competition to boost sales prices.

So if it looks like a seller's market now, that may not be the case come 2022.

## Viewpoint

## Cedric Glasper's 'American Dream'

By Andrew Schunk

To hear Cedric Glasper tell the story of his journey to Mechanical Rubber Co. Inc. is to experience a chapter of the American Dream.

It is the story of a young, ambitious mechanical engineer from the Heartland who took an incredibly big risk in purchasing a fledgling upstate New York seals and gaskets company in 1995, the same successful rubber and plastics firm he now leads as CEO.

But it is not a rags-to-riches story; rather, it is full of anomalies.

Cue Sinatra, because the way the 2021 *Rubber News* Executive of the Year got to where he was going was founded in hard work, but otherwise defied traditional tropes.

He is a business owner who appreciates and is appreciated, yet employs a "damn the torpedoes" leadership tack when necessary, a style that benefited a young Glasper when he purchased Mechanical Rubber, and a philosophy that aids him today amidst the chaos of the pandemic and supply chain nightmares.

"Does a comet look at its tail, at its own destruction? The comet is busy going where it's going," Glasper said. "If you have a plan to keep going ... to keep going ... to keep going ... to get to that end result, that is what matters."

While Glasper's father was hired through affirmative action by a then-small delivery firm known as UPS, Glasper does not employ any sort of quota or threshold when he does his own hiring, choosing instead to prioritize those applicants with diverse thought processes, regardless of color or creed.

He did not break out from the confines of the inner city or buck the small-town values of a rural community or rebuff the sameness of suburbia to reach his goals. Rather, he lived in all those places, and allowed them to shape him accordingly.



Glasper abides by a Jeffersonian philosophy in his drive to look over that next hill. However a Rumsfeldian outlook helped him get to those vantage points, realizing that he "didn't know what he didn't know," or as the former secretary of defense might have put it, "there were unknown unknowns."

His father was a Teamster and his mother was a member of the United Auto Workers—and while Glasper embraces union values, it is clear that Mechanical Rubber workers maintain an *esprit de corps* without being a union shop.

As Glasper embraces fear, the uncomfortable and the unknown in driving personal and professional growth, he does so with full and complete knowledge of his own identity.

"I don't spend a lot of time focusing on the fact I am Black," he told me earlier this year when we featured him in a story on diversity. "I know who I am. I'm fine with that. What I focus on is my competitor or my adversary, and they are the opportunity."

Thanks to Glasper, Mechanical Rubber employees embody many of the values of their CEO—hard work, independence, ownership and integrity.

With so much uncertainty in the manufactured rubber products industry, one empirical fact for the more than 30 workers at Mechanical Rubber is that their boss is deserving of the Executive of the Year honor.

"Cedric's determination (and) motivation ... inspire us all," said Nicole Cosimano, director of customer relations with Mechanical Rubber. "Cedric, I wish you continued success because you have earned it."

*Schunk is a reporter for Rubber News. He can be reached at andrew.schunk@crain.com.*

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Check out our website at [rubbernews.com](http://rubbernews.com)

**MUCH MORE M&A:** As the year comes to a close, M&A activity continues—and it's more than we can fit in print. Check the website for the latest.

**A NEW YEAR:** For its annual calendar, Pirelli turned the photography over to singer/songwriter Bryan Adams. Our online story features a video about and images from this year's project.

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## Quote of the week

*"I want the women who follow behind me to know that they can stand on my shoulders by way of seeing the example that I left."*

— Kim Dempsey-Miller, Rubber Division chair

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## M&A: Year End Selling Spree

# Molded Dimensions widens reach with PCO purchase

By Mike Scott

Rubber News Correspondent

PORT WASHINGTON, Wis.—The executive team at rubber, polyurethane and plastics manufacturer Molded Dimensions believes the most effective way to grow its molding business is through acquisitions.

And it's starting with the purchase of Marshfield, Wis.-based PCO Urethane, a maker of custom urethane parts including wheels, pipes, agricultural products and crane stops. The company serves customers in the agricultural, mining and manufacturing spheres.

Details of the acquisition—finalized in early December—and financial terms were not released. But the deal was made to help support Molded Dimensions' efforts to expand geographically, to eventually increase its reach in the Midwest, Northeast and Western U.S.

Just as importantly, the company pursued the deal because it recognized PCO Urethane's expertise would allow Molded Dimensions to expand its molded rubber, plastics and urethane offerings. This includes high-speed machine pouring and higher volume urethane and related complex components, said Bobby Desai, Molded Dimensions vice president of sales and marketing.

Plus, it will help Molded Di-

mensions broaden its portfolio of products it can market to existing customers.

We wanted to expand our offerings so we can cross-sell to our existing clients as well and be able to offer them even more



solutions," Desai said. "This will allow us to better meet the needs of large OEMs in particular. We are excited about becoming even better known as a leader in rubber, urethane and plastic."

Headquartered in Port Washington, Molded Dimensions manufactures custom-molded rubber and polyurethane components across numerous industries since first being established in 1964. It was acquired by venture capital firm Shoreview Private Equity in Minneapolis in 2018, giving Molded Dimensions the financial backing it needed to grow through acquisitions. Its new management team has taken an aggressive growth approach in pursuing sales, and it believes now is the time to speed up that growth effort.

Two of the larger industries it serves are lawn and garden and power sports, although the company's tagline is serving clients in industries from "medical to mining." Other notable sectors served including marine, aerospace, small engine makers and others.

No changes to staff or operations are expected at PCO Urethane's more than 50,000-sq.-ft. facility. In fact, the presence of Molded Dimensions' sales team likely will help to keep the Marshfield plant and its roughly 40 employees busy, possibly requiring the need to hire more professionals, Desai said. The potential employment opportunities extend to Molded Dimensions' headquarters and are expected to positively impact communities in central and southeastern Wisconsin and throughout the state.

PCO Urethane specialized in formulating new compounds, and designing new molds and equipment for custom applications.

"We expect it to be status quo and all staff (at PCO) to stay," Desai said. "Traditionally, PCO had done much more open cast, hand-poured and high-volume work, so it will complement us as well. (The acquisition) is expected to double our urethane business so that it will be about as large (revenue-wise) as our rubber work."



PCO Urethane, acquired by Molded Dimensions earlier this month, has expertise in designing new molds and equipment for custom applications.

The PCO brand is expected to remain for now.

PCO also has expertise in making metal parts such as rollers, gears and sprockets, Desai said. These types of longer-lasting parts require more abrasion resistance than what the new parent company is used to producing. Its Armadillo Pipe brand of products is highly regarded for clients in the agricultural, industrial, mining and other industries.

Molded Dimensions employed more than 115 before the acquisition, and projects a record-revenue year in 2021 after achieving consistent double-digit revenue growth in the years immediately

before the pandemic-impacted 2020, Desai said. Its client base ranges from producing industrial rubber components for large OEMs to making specific custom parts for small manufacturers.

"This acquisition is a tremendously exciting opportunity for our employees and our company expansion," Brian Sprinkman, president and CEO of Molded Dimensions, said in a statement. "When you add what Molded Dimensions offers in rubber production to an expanded urethane capacity, we are well-positioned to appeal to a wide range of customers in industries that use molded parts and components."

## Protective Industries buys Medbio

By Sarah Kominek

Plastics News

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich.—Protective Industries Inc. has stepped forward as the new owner of medical molder Medbio L.L.C. Protective Industries is owned by investment company Berwind Corp.

Graham Partners announced the sale of Grand Rapids-based Medbio Nov. 23, but at first did not identify the new owner.

Medbio joins brands including Caplugs, Mokon and Tristar in the Protective Industries group, and "will benefit from overlap with our medical and biotech customers," the company said in a Nov. 29 news release.

Caplugs has 10 manufacturing plants, located in New York, Pennsylvania, California, Texas, the Netherlands, Belgium, Australia, Canada and China.

"I am excited to continue to improve our customer offerings and company capabilities in conjunction with the resources and expertise of Berwind and Protective Industries Inc.," Medbio CEO Christopher Williams said in the release.

"Medbio looks forward to growing the brand and serving our customers through both organic growth and strategic acquisitions," the firm said.

Medbio is expanding its injection molding facilities in Orchard Park, N.Y., and Grand Rapids, Mich., to bring additional clean room manufacturing, warehouse and office space to both locations.

Philadelphia-based Berwind bought Protective Industries and Caplugs in 2015. Caplugs is based in Buffalo, N.Y., and was founded in 1948. Its plastics manufacturing capabilities include injection molding, vinyl-dip molding, vinyl coating, extrusion, compression molding and die-cutting.

Medbio was No. 91 in *Plastics News'* most recent ranking of North American injection molders with \$90 million in annual sales in the region and No. 94 among North American mold makers with \$4.3 million in sales. It also has liquid silicone rubber operations.

Williams said Graham Holdings' "operational, manufacturing and financial expertise catalyzed our business, positioning us for future lasting growth and profitability." Williams' family sold a majority stake in Medbio to Graham in 2018.

Medbio specializes in clean room injection molding processes for medical device, life science and biotechnology components.

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# Defining 2021

Supply chain woes, large deals, infrastructure dominate year's top 10 stories



Every facet of the shipping and logistics industry was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Across the rubber industry, rising costs and severe shipping delays were norms, and the resulting challenges defined 2021 for many.

By Erin Pustay Beaven  
Rubber News Staff

There are moments that change the rubber industry—acquisitions that reshape the landscape, leaders who paved the way forward and trends that redefined how the entire world does business. And it was in the wake of the unexpected and unprecedented 2020 that 2021 took shape. It was a year that marked a slow return to normalcy and it was one filled with optimism, despite some of the challenges that still remain.

Here are the 10 biggest stories of 2021, selected by the *Rubber News* staff.

## 1. Shipping and logistics nightmares

If there is one thing that rubber industry executives can blame their lack of sleep on this year, it's the shipping and logistics nightmare that resulted from last year's pandemic-induced slowdowns and shutdowns.

During the COVID-19 crisis, U.S. ports were backlogged as economies ground to a halt and the spread of the virus left ports—particularly in hard-hit California—short-handed. That bottleneck was compounded by the imbalance of trade, which left empty shipping containers in locations that aren't exporting as much as they need to import.

So far, the backlog hasn't cleared, leaving cargo ships sitting for days—and in many cases weeks—at ports as they wait to be unloaded.

This makes any available space on container ships precious, setting off a bidding war that pits companies against one another as they battle to get their goods on ships.

The container location issue is at the heart of many shipping delays, and for the North American rubber industry in particular, that's problematic because North America is reliant on Asia for raw materi-

als and chemicals. When a small blip turns into a larger logistical headache, the North American rubber industry doesn't have much wiggle room.

And it's not just the rubber industry—it's other industries, too. The auto industry's microchip shortage was exacerbated by the industry's reliance on a single region to produce the chips and the efficiency of shipping to get the products to North American plants on time.

Likewise, much-needed personal protective equipment—gloves and face masks, for instance—saw shortages globally.

During Michelin's Movin'On Summit, held virtually in June, Francois-Philippe Champagne, Canada's minister of innovation science and industry, said these shipping issues rise to levels of national security. The remedy, he said, is to onshore production of some goods—microchips, PPE and vaccines, for instance.

"I think we are going from global to regional. And I can tell you, from a government perspective, we are putting more emphasis on (supply chain) resiliency than (supply chain) efficiency," Champagne said. "That is true of Canada, but I can tell you it is true of the G7, it is true in the Five Eyes, it is true between Canada and North America and our U.S. friends.

"And you will see a number of investments to be more resilient when it comes to microchips, when it comes to batteries, when it comes to bio-manufacturing," he said. "'Never again' is what we are saying as a government. 'Never again will we be in the same position.'"

The shipping industry wasn't the only one impacted by the pandemic. Air freight and trucking had problems of their own.

Auto suppliers, in particular, fought for air freight—precious cargo space on commercial airlines whose flights have been grounded and scaled back amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. The squeeze on

available air freight space—both through commercial airlines and air freight companies—is causing costs to skyrocket.

Trucking also has faced significant delays and soaring prices, in part because of bottlenecks at the ports, but also because of driver shortages.

Industrywide these issues have resulted in product shortages, shipping delays and sky-high prices that are pushed from supplier to manufacturer, and ultimately, the consumer.

## 2. Congress passes infrastructure bill

Bipartisan legislation is rare these days, particularly at the federal level. So any legislation that garners significant

approval from both sides of the aisle is likely to get attention.

The good news for the rubber industry is that when Congress agreed on a bill, it agreed on infrastructure, an area where many rubber industry companies could gain.

The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act passed the House Nov. 5 with a 228-206 vote after previous approval from the Senate (69-30 vote) in August.

President Biden signed the bill Nov. 15.

The IIJA is a \$1 trillion investment that has its roots in a \$2 trillion infrastructure proposal put forth by the White House March 31. The version signed by Biden echoes many of the priorities he laid out in his proposal—dubbed the American Jobs Plan—earlier this year, but with fewer dollars designated to many of the areas.

By far the largest amount of IIJA funding (\$110 billion) is earmarked for improving roads and bridges. Money also is designated for railroads (\$66 billion), broadband internet expansion and electrical grid modernization (\$65 billion each), public transit (\$39 billion), airports (\$25 billion), and ports and waterways (\$17 billion).

Additionally, \$7.5 billion has been designated for upgrading infrastructure for electric vehicles.

IIJA has been applauded by a number of rubber industry organizations and associations including the U.S. Tire Manufacturers Association, NAHAD, the Motor & Equipment Manufacturers Association and the United Steelworkers union.

## 3. Goodyear buys Cooper Tire

When Goodyear announced Feb. 22 that it had reached an agreement to purchase Cooper Tire & Rubber Co. in a \$2.5 billion cash-and-stock purchase, it sent shock waves through the tire industry. The deal would bring together Goodyear, the world's third-largest tire maker—with annual global sales of \$13.7 billion—with the 13th-largest tire maker in Cooper Tire, which has annual global sales of around \$2.8 billion.

The acquisition was finalized June 7, overcoming a few hurdles along the way—including a trio of legal challenges from Cooper shareholders.



The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act passed the Senate in August and was approved by the House in November. President Biden signed the bill Nov. 15.

In addition to helping Goodyear solidify its place as the No. 3 tire maker worldwide, the deal brought two of the few remaining U.S.-based tire makers together under one umbrella and helped to set the course for what Richard Kramer, Goodyear chairman, CEO and president, emphasized would be a technology-driven, new-mobility company.

“We are excited to officially bring Goodyear and Cooper together and unite our shared focus on customers, innovation and high-quality products and solutions,” Kramer said. “This combination strengthens Goodyear’s ability to serve more consumers globally and provides increased scale to support greater investments in new mobility and fleet solutions.”

With the deal, Goodyear also expanded its footprint in China, a rapidly growing space in the automotive sphere, where Cooper Tire had established a presence. Combined, the Goodyear-Cooper tire com-



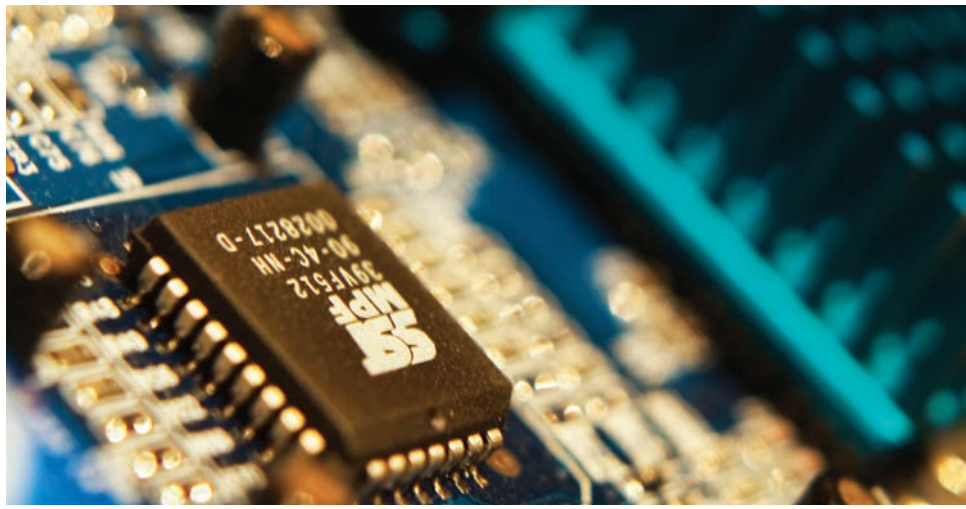
pany operates more than 50 manufacturing sites worldwide and has a global annual capacity for more than 200 million tires.

According to financial reports, Goodyear may already be seeing the impact of the Cooper deal. Shortly after the acquisition, Goodyear rolled out a strong second-quarter financial report, echoing a first-quarter showing that Goodyear called its best Q1 in three years. Things continued to improve for Goodyear even as headwinds set in during the third quarter. The company reported that Q3 sales improved by 42 percent year-over-year, an achievement it credited to the addition of Cooper Tire.

#### 4. Microchip shortage hits suppliers

It’s been a devilish year for auto suppliers, which previously managed to make it through the 2020 slowdowns and shutdowns. And while a number of factors contributed to stresses experienced, one overarching factor has loomed all year long: microchip shortages.

The shortage has its roots in the pandemic’s effects. Worldwide, when stay-at-home/shelter-in-place orders were instat-



**As of Thanksgiving, the auto industry saw more than 10.1 million vehicles affected by the slowdowns caused by the microchip shortage.**

ed to help slow the spread of COVID-19, consumers continued to spend. Among the items that saw jumps in purchases were consumer electronics, which helped to increase the demand for and redirect the usage of microchips.

When auto makers again resumed manufacturing, they found the supply of semiconductors to be short, and the situation never really righted itself. As a result, auto makers throughout 2021 were forced to slow or halt production of certain vehicles to help manage inventory.

As of Thanksgiving, the auto industry saw more than 10.1 million vehicles affected by the slowdowns.

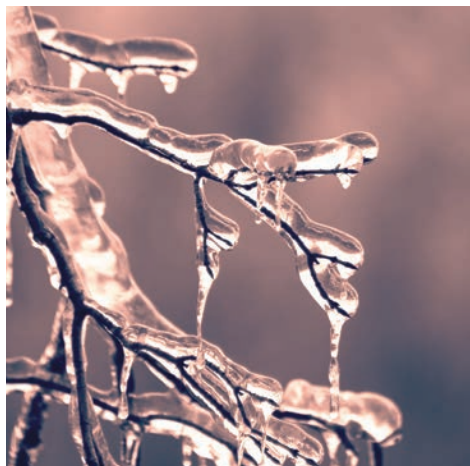
In its most recent forecast, Alix-Partners estimates that the semiconductor shortage is likely to cost the global auto industry \$210 billion this year—that’s nearly double that of a May forecast issued by the same organization.

#### 5. Texas Freeze

Texas isn’t used to prolonged deep freezes. So when an extended cold snap gripped the southern state in mid-February, residents and companies were left to manage the winter weather without electricity.

The state’s power grid was strained under the power demands caused by the cold temperatures, causing widespread power outages across the state.

“We had about five days of misery,” Bill



**Texas experienced a prolonged deep freeze in February that brought hardship to the state.**

Hyde, executive director of olefins and elastomers for IHS Markit, told *Rubber News*. “The damage during that brief period of time, it’s almost apocalyptic.”

It also added up to a major headache for the petrochemicals industry, which was forced to shut down operations in the wake of the cold-induced concerns. The delays in production trickled through a rubber industry supply chain already strained by shipping and logistics problems lingering from the COVID-19 pandemic.

“The petrochemical assets along the Gulf Coast are just not designed to operate reliably in subfreezing temperatures,” Hyde said. “Most of our design parameters are around let’s shed as much heat as we can during the summertime. But they are not about protecting sensitive equipment from extreme cold in the winter.”

“We can go several years between freezes and a typical freeze here is for a few hours overnight. It’s not for four days, so the impact to the industry can be significant,” he said.

Later in the year, Hyde noted that it took some petrochemicals facilities about six weeks to resume production. It was

quite a hit for the industry, which already was battling shortages and price hikes—lingering pandemic effects.

#### 6. Biden pushes EVs

It didn’t take long for President Biden to establish priorities for his administration. Within a week of taking office, he signed a pair of executive orders aimed at climate change, infrastructure and jobs.

With the Made in America executive order signed Jan. 25, he called on the U.S. government to lean into green automotive technology and prioritize purchases of American-made cars with U.S.-made components—and prioritize vehicles assembled at union shops.

The move put some muscle behind the EV transition, as Biden pledged to purchase EVs for the federal government’s 650,000 fleet vehicles.

In March, when the Biden administration rolled out its vision for infrastructure with the \$2 trillion American Jobs Plan, the proposal featured \$174 billion for electric vehicle infrastructure, including 500,000 charging stations nationwide (though that part of the proposal was drastically trimmed down in the final version that was signed into law in November).

The funding also was intended to help auto makers spur domestic supply chains, retool factories and shore up domestic supplies of materials needed for next-generation batteries.

Combined, the efforts signaled the administration’s vision for the future of the auto industry and the kind of steps it was willing to take to help achieve that.

It also was well-timed news for the U.S. auto industry, which is positioned for a swift transition from internal combustion engine vehicles to electrified powertrains. According to the Center for Automotive Research, North American consumers had a choice of 67 EV models available across all segments. But by 2024, more than 200 electric vehicle models will be in showrooms across the continent.

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**President Biden, who has pushed the manufacturing and sales of electric vehicles since taking office, recently took a drive in an electric Jeep Wrangler.**

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# 7 under-the-radar stories of 2021

By Erin Pustay Beaven  
Rubber News Staff

Every year, there are stories that fly a little below the radar. They may peak our interest, make us smile or even surprise us. They may not be the biggest stories of the year, and sometimes their impact—though minimal now—may be felt in the years ahead.

This year, *Rubber News* is taking a look at some of the stories that fit the bill. They may have gone unnoticed or gotten lost amid the busy and challenge-filled 2021, but they are certainly worth looking back at.

Here, in no particular order, are seven stories from the last 12 months that may have gone under-the-radar.

## 1. Rubber meets the stars

When the Flagstaff, Ariz.-based Lowell Observatory set about restoring its iconic 125-year-old Clark Telescope, it opted for authenticity.

As part of the project, 21 “vin-

tage-looking” Firestone tires were installed along the dome of the observatory. They’re used to help the dome rotate when the telescope is in use.

The Clark Telescope at the Lowell Observatory is a storied one. Pluto, after all, was discovered right there at the observatory by self-taught astronomer Clyde Tombaugh in 1930.

But that’s not the facility’s only claim to fame. Several astronauts, who later would be part of

historic NASA missions to the moon, visited the observatory to study the maps.

“The first group of astronauts to train in northern Arizona—the so-called Next Nine, which included the likes of Neil Armstrong, Jim Lovell, Frank Borman and others—also went to Lowell Observatory on a winter day in 1963 to learn mapping techniques from the moon mapping team,” the Lowell Observatory noted on its website.



Vintage-looking Firestone tires were installed as part of renovations at the Lowell Observatory in Flagstaff, Ariz.

## 2. Here comes the sun(flower)

Make room dandelions. There may be a new alternative rubber on the horizon.

In April, David Woodburn, CEO of Edison Agrosiences Inc., reported that his company has made strides in the development of natural rubber derived from sunflowers.

The leaves of sunflowers contain small amounts of natural rubber—between 0.2 percent and 1.6 percent of their leaf weight. And while that doesn’t seem like much now, Woodburn and his team—backed by new investors—are hoping that genetic modifications to the plants could double, triple or even quadruple the natural rubber output.

The ability to improve the NR production opens the door for the commercial viability of the latex and could provide a domestic NR source for North America.

“With the sunflower, we have an opportunity to transition to a domestically grown crop that could fit into a traditional, high-yield agricultural cropping system,” said Blake Bextine, program manager for the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency. “This would reduce our dependence on an external source of natural rubber that is susceptible to fluctuation in supply be-

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# Defining

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## 7. Top Gloves seized

The U.S. Customs and Border Patrol in March began seizing imports of nitrile rubber gloves made by Malaysia-based Top Glove Corp., saying that the manufacturer had used forced labor in the production of those gloves.

Impactt Ltd., an independent consultancy dedicated to identifying and promoting ethical trade practices, identified a total of 11 indicators of forced labor during an investigation of Top Glove completed in August 2020. Among the concerns it noted were abuse of vulnerability, retention of identity documents, restriction of movement, excessive overtime, abusive working and living conditions and deception. Other indicators included isolation, debt bondage, withholding of wages, physical and sexual violence, and intimidation.

In a May statement, Top Glove claimed to have resolved all of the issues in the report and claimed that Impactt could confirm the steps it had taken to address any issues of concern.

Among the measures taken by Top Glove was a remuneration package of \$33 million to affected workers.

Imports of Top Glove products were cleared to enter the U.S. again as of Sept. 10.

In October, another glove maker faced a similar issue as the U.S. placed a “withhold release order” on disposable gloves



U.S. Customs and Border Patrol seized imports of gloves from Top Glove in March.

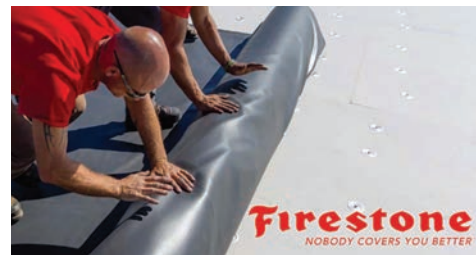
produced by Malaysian manufacturer Supermax Corp. and its subsidiaries for alleged forced labor.

## 8. Firestone sells building products

Bridgestone Americas Inc. is focused on new technology and tire development. And the sale of its Firestone Building Products unit is proof of where the company sees its future.

In a \$3.4 billion deal that took about three months to close, Bridgestone Corp. sold its flat roofing systems unit to LafargeHolcim Ltd., a company grounded in the cement, concrete and aggregates space.

With the purchase of Firestone Building Products, LafargeHolcim added 1,900 employees and a business that had sales of about \$1.8 billion in 2020. Firestone Building Products also held about a 4-percent share of the world’s flat-roof market at the time of the sale.



## 9. Danfoss closes on Eaton deal

It took 19 months for Danfoss Co. to officially acquire Eaton Corp.’s hydraulics unit, but the finalization of the \$3.3 billion deal on Aug. 2 marked the marriage of the two largest power management companies.

With the move, 10,000 former Eaton employees were added to the Danfoss team. Moreover, with the Eaton Hydraulics addition, Nordborg, Denmark-based Danfoss increased its annual revenue by about \$1.8 billion and roughly doubled the size of its Danfoss Power Solutions segment.

Overall, the hydraulics business represented about 10 percent of Eaton’s operations, including a substantial hydraulic and industrial hose business.

The transaction, first announced early in 2020, was contingent upon U.S. Department of Justice and European regula-



Danfoss completed its \$3.3 billion purchase of Eaton’s Hydraulics unit, adding 10,000 employees and about \$1.8 billion in revenue to its firm.

tory agency approval and the subsequent divestment of Danfoss and Eaton facilities in the orbital motor and hydraulics steering unit spaces.

## 10. Kumho unionizes

It took three years, a whole host of allegations by both parties and about a dozen disputed ballots, but full-time and part-time employees at Kumho Tire USA Inc.’s Macon, Ga., plant officially unionized—by way of a single vote.

A total of 311 workers at the plant were eligible to cast a ballot with the ultimate outcome being 145 to 144 in favor of union representation. The final vote total took months to determine as 13 ballots were

contested and the NLRB had to vote on their legitimacy.

And it wasn’t until a Jan. 20 ruling by Lisa Y. Henderson, acting director for Region 10 of the National Labor Relations Board in Atlanta, that the United Steelworkers union was certified as “the representative of the appropriate bargaining unit.”

Since the plant opened in 2017, workers there mulled the idea of joining the United Steelworkers union. During the three-plus years that followed, the employees, union and tire maker were embroiled in a heated back-and-forth, accusing one another of unfair practices to garner or deter unionization votes.



Employees at Kumho’s Macon, Ga., plant officially unionized after a January ruling by the National Labor Relations Board.



**Bridgestone's expertise in designing EV tires served as the foundation for the custom-engineered Turanza Eco. The partnership between Bridgestone and Lightyear traces back to 2018, when the tire maker offered to take on the task of designing tires for a solar-powered vehicle.**

## Stories

*Continued from page 12*

cause of environmental impacts due to weather, pests and pathogen damage.”

### 3. Running on sunshine

Netherlands-based mobility innovator Lightyear is set to debut its Lightyear One, the first commercially available solar-powered vehicle.

The vehicle, which features a large solar roof that is used to charge the battery, is targeted for the European market. Consumers can reserve a vehicle now and orders are set to be delivered in the summer of 2022.

And when Lightyear One hits roadways next year, it won't just be running on solar power. It will run on Bridgestone's custom-engineered Turanza Eco tires.

The tire maker tapped its expertise in designing electric vehicle tires for the new solar vehicle. The Turanza Eco, Bridgestone said, features very low rolling resistance, which helps to boost range when compared to alternative Bridgestone EV-specific tires. The tire maker also said it was able to improve silica dispersion through a new mixing technology, resulting in a 10-percent overall reduction in the tire's weight per vehicle without sacrificing wear or safety.

### 4. NAM takes a stand

After the Jan. 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol by armed Trump supporters intent on stopping the certification of the 2020 election results, the National Association of Manufacturers took a stance on the matter.

Jay Timmons, president of the trade group, called the attack an act of sedition and said it should be treated as such.



**The National Association of Manufacturers called on Vice President Mike Pence to “seriously consider” working with the Cabinet to invoke the 25th Amendment.**

He called on Vice President Mike Pence to “seriously consider” working with the Cabinet to invoke the 25th amendment and remove President Trump from office for his role in inciting the mob.

“Armed, violent protesters who support the baseless claim by outgoing President Trump that he somehow won an election that he overwhelmingly lost have stormed the U.S. Capitol today, attacking police officers and first responders, because Trump refused to accept defeat in a free and fair election,” Timmons said.

“Throughout this whole disgusting episode, Trump has been cheered on by members of his own party, adding fuel to the distrust that has inflamed violent anger. This is not law and order. This is chaos. It is mob rule. It is dangerous. ...

“This is not the vision of America that manufacturers believe in and work so hard to defend,” he added.

### 5. Tristone closes U.S. plant

The automotive slowdowns and shutdowns of 2020, those that resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic, hit many suppliers hard. And Tristone Flowtech Group

GmbH was no exception. The impact of the pandemic forced the hose maker to shutter its plant in Mooresville, N.C.

The under-the-radar part of the story? Frankfurt, Germany-based Tristone had opened the North Carolina factory just two years earlier in May 2019.

The company had invested \$23.6 million in the 200,000-sq.-ft. facility, breaking ground on the project in 2018. About 177,000 square feet at the Mooresville site was earmarked for manufacturing and logistics and the remainder of the space was used for offices.

Tristone, which operates a similar site in Delicias, Mexico, told the North Carolina Department of Commerce in a Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification Act notice that operations at the U.S. facility would be transferred to the one in Mexico.

In all, about 50 people were laid off in North Carolina.

### 6. A dog. A blimp. And a robot.

Sometimes, history is made in unexpected ways. That was the case for the iconic Goodyear Blimp, which for the first time welcomed a dog to the co-pilot seat.

Seamus, an acting dog who appears alongside Tom Hanks in a new Apple TV+ film “Finch,” climbed aboard the blimp because the four-legged character he plays in the film is named after the Akron-based tire maker. In the movie, Finch—a robotics engineer—names the dog for the Goodyear tire he was found abandoned in.

Joining Seamus aboard the blimp last month was Jeff the robot, who also appears in the film.

The airship Seamus and Jeff boarded is stationed in Gardena, Calif., and frequently is seen in the skies over college football stadiums, basketball games and beaches along the Pacific Ocean.

### 7. Mission: Mars

Rubber is a remarkable material, transforming the ways we move every single day. On Earth, that is.

Mars is a bit trickier with its surging temperatures, low pressure, high levels of radiation and rough terrain. So NASA

engineers have set about reinventing the wheel a bit.

The team at NASA Glenn Research Center in Cleveland developed the Shape Memory Alloy (SMA) Spring Tire that can handle the heavy load of a lunar rover while traversing rough, rocky Martian terrain and enduring extreme temperatures.

“This particular material doesn't deform like conventional material, where in those materi-

als, when we put stress on them, we basically are stretching the bonds between the atomic structure,” said Santo Padula, who helped design the new tires.

The team used the famous Apollo missions' spring tires as inspiration and built on the successes they had achieved little more than a decade earlier, when NASA partnered with Goodyear to build and test prototype tires for the Martian missions.



**The tire designed for Mars can take on rocky surfaces without trouble.**



**Seamus pretends to pilot the Goodyear blimp.**



**Tristone closed its North Carolina facility just two years after opening it. Here, construction crews work on the building in 2018.**



**Seamus was the first dog to serve as co-pilot for the Goodyear Blimp.**

# NR sector faced numerous hurdles in 2021

By Bruce Meyer  
Rubber News Staff

The natural rubber market had a rocky journey during 2021. It was one where the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic almost caused more distress for the sector this year than in 2020.

The supply-demand balance was one area of concern, with demand increasing from the depths of the coronavirus-induced collapse faster than NR supply could rebound.

There also were continued efforts throughout 2021 to make life better for the smallholders responsible for roughly 85 percent of the world's supply of natural rubber, coupled with work to make the entire NR supply chain sustainable.

In addition, there was no slowdown in the research to develop alternative forms of natural rubber that someday can make the rubber industry less reliant on the NR sourced from the traditional nations in Southeast Asia.

## Fighting a 'perfect storm'

Global measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in 2020 caused demand to plummet, but when the need for NR began to grow once again, issues such as flooding and tree disease made it difficult for NR suppliers to meet demand.

"(I'm) worried about supply," Ryan Wiener, global head of sustainable development and strategic marketing for Corrie MacColl Ltd., told *Rubber News* in March. "Years of low prices have allowed demand to outpace growth in supply, and it's high time the world realizes that the material, which is so vital in powering humanity's mobility, is scarce."

Besides the difficulty in securing enough supply of natural rubber, the supply chain issues that continue to plague all industries hit the NR sector particularly hard. While what may have cost \$2,000 a ton to ship previously, now was costing NR suppliers more than double or even triple to ship, industry sources said.

"You have what I call a perfect storm on natural rubber," said Whitney Luckett, founding president of Southland Rubber Inc.

Wiener said it all reinforced his premise that natural rubber continues to be under-appreciated. "Natural rubber is listed on the European Union's Critical Raw Material list, and to this point, there is no replacement material," he said.

Potential shortages of NR both now and in the years to come remain a distinct possibility. Wiener said his firm projects that demand could outstrip supply by as much as 900,000 metric tons a year by 2027.

## Importance of smallholders

Luckett said that one huge factor that leads to supply shortage is the length of the supply chain, saying that just-in-time techniques can't function properly when the supply chain spans 15,000 miles.

She added that taking care of the smallholders and helping them remain financially viable is one of her top concerns. Without proper pricing, they won't be able to afford adequate living standards let alone care for their crops.

Corrie MacColl, in fact, set up a program in 2020 that is intended to improve farmers' lives. Wiener said there are 6 million smallholders in the world producing rubber, and they face some of the toughest environmental and social issues of anyone.



The natural rubber market was battered by the COVID-19 pandemic last year, leaving supply short just as prices recovered.

So Corrie MacColl developed the Cameroon Outgrower Programme with the idea of helping small rubber farmers improve their agricultural skills. For example, the program will help the smallholders learn about sustainable agriculture methods that will help protect against deforestation.

"What they do is slash and burn," Wiener said. "Their farming practices are as bad as they can be. What this does is it creates a negative impact on the world's environment, especially when it comes to climate change."

The program is intended to benefit the company as well, as the education should bring higher rubber yields that Corrie MacColl will have available for its customers.

In addition, a dozen leading tire makers aligned their natural rubber procurement policies with the policy framework of the Global Platform for Sustainable Natural Rubber. The policies now feature components such as commitment to legal compliance; healthy functioning ecosystems; respecting human rights; community livelihoods; supply chain assessments; and traceability, monitoring and reporting.

According to the GPSNR, the policy framework will bring an estimated 13.6 million acres of land used for rubber production under the purview of sustainability commitments. The Singapore-based group said the actions will positively impact more than 3 million smallholders.

**Achieving alternative supplies**  
Tor Hough, CEO of Elm Analytics L.L.C. said the biggest issue for North America is establishing a sustainable onshore supply. "Without a national stockpile there needs to be some kind of mecha-

nism that makes it commercially possible for that intermediate to handle those onshore inventories of rubber," he said.

Research on alternative NR supply sources has been ongoing for decades, and that continued during 2021. With more than 90 percent of the world's natural rubber supply coming from *hevea* trees, primarily grown in Southeast Asia, those in the industry have been looking at such plants as guayule, Russian dandelions and even sunflowers as potential future NR sources that can be commercially viable.

Bridgestone Americas Inc. and Nokian Tyres P.L.C. are two firms that continue to look closely at guayule.

Nokian said guayule shows promise beyond its ability to blend well into rubber compounds and demonstrate properties similar to *hevea* rubber. Those include the plant's ability to revitalize regions or areas not typically conducive to farming.

"By researching the commercialization of guayule tire-grade natural rubber, we are working to diversify the world's natural rubber supply and help establish a more sustainable and predictable business path," said Andrew Thompson, director of sustainability policy for Bridgestone Americas.

The firm focuses its development work at its Biorubber Process Research Center in Mesa, Ariz., opened in 2014.

Thompson said by the end of the decade Bridgestone expects to be "scaling guayule productivity, establishing new production processes and improving logistics."

# USW continues fight for antidumping tariffs

By Bruce Meyer  
Rubber News Staff

With no major contract negotiations going on with tire producers in 2021, the United Steelworkers spent a lot of time fighting for antidumping duties to be levied on imports it believes are undercutting U.S. tire production.

Battles over what the union considered unfair imports started early in the year, when the U.S. Department of Commerce preliminarily ruled that passenger and light truck tires imported from South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand and Vietnam should be subject to antidumping duties ranging up to 98.44 percent.

"For too long, bad actors seeking to exploit the U.S. market have engaged in illegal dumping, undercutting domestic manufacturers' ability to compete on a level playing field," the USW said in a statement.

The union then told the DOC it opposed a proposal from Taiwan's leading tire makers to suspend the pending antidumping investigation into imports of passenger and light truck tires from Taiwan in exchange for pricing oversight provisions.

Later in the year, the International Trade Commission voted to uphold antidumping duties on consumer tires from South Korea, Taiwan and Thailand, but dismissed Vietnam from the case. It did, however, enact lower countervailing duties on tire makers from Vietnam.

The USW represents about 12,000 workers at eight consumer tire factories in the U.S., while 16 other non-unionized tire plants in the U.S. produce P/LT tires, with

roughly 20,000 workers. Throughout its years of fighting for antidumping tariffs, the Steelworkers leadership has maintained that, while its members are its first priority, in these cases the entire U.S. tire manufacturing sector benefits when the tariffs are enacted.

"Underselling at significant margins was nearly universal in all products, covering tires from all countries and regardless of whether the imports and domestic product were branded or private label," the USW said in relation to this particular case.

As has been the case with all the dumping petitions the USW has brought over the years, no U.S.-based tire maker testified in favor of the duties.

When asked by ITC commissioners why U.S. tire makers that supposedly are being harmed weren't part of this action, USW President Tom Conway called U.S. tire makers "spineless" and said: "Companies won't join the case because they're scared of China ... of getting their tires blocked from the marketplace there," or having power cut to their factories there.

Two tire companies with manufacturing in the U.S. did testify against the duties: Hankook Tire USA Inc., whose employees are non-union and its parent firm is based in South Korea; and Sumitomo Rubber North America Inc., whose workers are represented by the USW.

Richard Smallwood, president and CEO of Sumitomo Rubber North America, testified that the "U.S. tire market is in a state of constant and accelerating transition, and producers in the U.S. do not have the capac-

ity or production flexibility to fully and profitably service all market segments."

In another trade action that took place in 2021, the USW was in favor of an interim deal between the U.S. and European Union to amend the tariff structures on U.S. aluminum and steel imports from the EU. Many in the industry saw the measure as relief for domestic manufacturers and a platform from which carbon emissions can be addressed.

"Engaging with our allies is a necessary step in this process, and this arrangement offers a path forward toward working together to address this larger concern," Conway said of the deal. "Combating climate change will also require coordinating with our partners. Both the U.S. and European industries have demonstrated a commitment to reducing the carbon intensity of their products, and working together will ultimately provide results for workers and our environment."

## Battling Kumho, Giti

The year didn't go without a couple of tussles between the Steelworkers and tire manufacturers.

Early in the year, the National Labor Relations Board certified the USW as the bargaining unit for the Kumho Tire USA Inc. production plant in Georgia. The two sides had battled over the union's organizational attempts for years before this decision came down.

Not long after, the union asked the Macon-Bibb County Industrial Authority to "intervene in a deadly COVID-19 outbreak

at the Georgia plant." The USW alleged "at least 12 workers contracted the virus and one died in the latest wave of infections affecting the facility."

But Kumho pushed back against union allegations regarding the company's actions during the pandemic. "The union's statement that the company is not implementing the kinds of safety precautions now standard in most U.S. workplaces is without merit," Keith Lolley, human resources director at the plant, said in an email statement.

The Steelworkers also engaged with Giti Tire (USA) Ltd., which produces tires at a factory in Richburg, S.C. First the USW said Giti didn't qualify for millions of dollars in federal COVID-19 relief because it permanently laid off workers after accepting \$8 million in Paycheck Protection Program funding designed to keep workers on the job.

Then the union claimed that Giti was mistreating workers at the Richburg facility. A group of more than 40 community leaders sent a letter in November to the firm's CEO, making claims of "low wages, unpredictable schedules and oppressive amounts of mandatory overtime that leave workers no time for their families."

Giti Tire rejected the claims, linking the allegations to a union membership drive at the site.

"People who have been a part of our community, and surrounding communities, know that you can have problems with union representation that can hurt job security and long-term success," David Shelton, Giti's director of industry relations, said in a statement.

# Headaches and hope

## 2021 a challenging, enlightening year for automotive

By Erin Pustay Beaven  
Rubber News Staff

All the chaos and unpredictability that defined 2020 lingered all the way through 2021. And those lingering impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic were significant.

Shipping and logistics remain major headaches for manufacturers and suppliers alike, who are working to balance ledgers with skyrocketing materials and shipping costs. It's the issue that has defined 2021 for many in the rubber industry, and those in the automotive sector particularly.

But for every headache, there was hope. Great innovation also helped to shape 2021.

Tire makers made strides in their understanding and development of alternative natural rubbers. Manufacturers and suppliers committed to sustainability goals, designed products that met higher environmental standards and invested in creating solutions that kept next-generation vehicles safer.

Here's a look at some of the trends emerging in the automotive space this year.

### Microchips

Before December arrived, the auto industry hit a production milestone ... and it wasn't a good one.

According to AutoForecast Solutions, 10 million fewer vehicles than anticipated were made globally in 2021, a direct result of the microchip shortage.

That number was expected to eclipse the 11 million mark by the end of the year.

North America appears to be the hardest hit by the shortage, losing more than 3.15 million vehicles to the semiconductor shortage by Thanksgiving week, according to *Automotive News* data. Europe reported a loss of about 2.86 million vehicles by that time, while China and Asia reported losses of just fewer than 2 million each.

And while that was bad news for OEMs and dealers, it didn't hurt their bottom lines. This year, both auto makers and



Nuro developed small, autonomous vehicles to deliver goods such as groceries and meals. It's just one company working to perfect new auto technology in the last-mile delivery space.

auto dealers reported record profits. Auto suppliers, meanwhile, flailed. Their profits are dependent on building more cars, and with 10 million fewer cars being made it's hard to sell parts. Add to that the skyrocketing materials and shipping costs, and it creates quite a challenge.

Mega suppliers Lear Corp. and Mega International Inc. both reported massive losses in the third quarter. Magna's net income plunged 97 percent compared to the same quarter in 2020. Cooper-Standard Automotive Inc. lost \$123.2 million in the third quarter and set about trying to recoup at least \$100 million through renegotiated contracts.

On the tire side, sales rebounded for the aftermarket, but OE struggled. According to the U.S. Tire Manufacturers Association's Dec. 2 forecast, projected total U.S. tire shipments will increase 10.8 percent this year to 336 million units. That's an improvement over 2020 and just 1 percent more than 2019's total of 332.7 million units.

### Delivering on technology

Technology is redefining the automotive landscape, driving developments in autonomy, electrification and sustainability.

And when it comes to the testing and adoption of those technologies, the last-mile delivery space is leading the charge. The sector is the perfect proving grounds because the geographic areas in which the technology is tested are more manageable, said Carla Bailo, president and CEO of the Center for Automotive Research.

"The (fewer) variables you put into a route makes it more able to be autonomous or semi-autonomous and use different modes of delivery than a very complex situation of commuting somewhere or being in mixed traffic or mixed roadwork," she said. "That is why you are able to see the technology really start to blossom, and you perfect it in those kinds of situations."

Whether it is small, autonomous robots delivering meals to college dorms—in the case of Starship, a Goodyear-backed start-

up—or Amazon's electrified delivery vehicles brining packages to door steps, the future of the auto industry is blossoming in the last-mile space.

### Keeping it cool

BEVs are coming. And rubber industry companies are working to ensure their safety.

Earlier this year, Freudenberg Sealing Technologies invested an undisclosed six-figure amount in special lab and testing capabilities at its Plymouth Central Laboratory designed to test the safety and durability of its products.

At the heart of the investment was a specially designed isolation and containment chamber (IsoC), measuring 6-by-3-by-3 feet. The two-chambered, glass and steel enclosure allows materials and products to be tested safely against the lithium electrolytic solutions found in lithium-ion battery cells.

The auto supplier claimed to be the first in the industry to provide the rigorous testing for its products. That's due to the ongoing investment costs. Just one gallon of the solution needed for testing could cost thousands of dollars.

"To my knowledge, none of our competitors have these testing capabilities," said Joe Walker, global technology director of materials and laboratories for FST.

Dow this year opened a pair of laboratory and testing facilities to help its customers more quickly create solutions designed for EVs. Located in Michigan and Texas, the labs are dedicated to NVH, sealing and under-the-hood applications. Each represent a multi-million dollar investment made over several years.

Overseas, DuPont Mobility & Materials is making investments of its own. It began work on a new manufacturing facility in China and is expanding capacity at sites in Schkopau, Germany, and Freienbach, Switzerland.

# Replacement shipments lead tire sector rebound

By Bruce Meyer  
Rubber News Staff

Going back to 2020, numbers in the tire industry were so poor that this year almost had to be an improvement.

After all, when the coronavirus pandemic first broke out in early 2020, tire factories worldwide closed temporarily, some for months. That led to an 8.2 percent drop in tire-related revenue for the Top 75 tire makers. Among the top 25 firms worldwide, tire sales fell at 20 of the 25 firms, with a dozen of the producers posting double-digit declines.

But 2021 has been much nicer to the tire industry, particularly on the replacement side, as the public resumed driving at more traditional levels and, therefore, began buying tires again.

In its latest forecast released Dec. 2, the U.S. Tire Manufacturers Association projected overall U.S. tire shipments will climb 10.8 percent to 336 million units, nearly 33 million units above 2020 and 1 percent higher than the 332.7 million units shipped in 2019.

During the year, the USTMA forecast for aftermarket tires rose each time the association updated, from March to August, and then again in December. The group now projects passenger replacements to

climb 10.9 percent, light truck tires to grow 16.8 percent and truck/bus tires to jump 18.1 percent.

The picture for original equipment tire shipments, while still above 2020, isn't quite as bright. The USTMA downgraded its projections for OE in its latest update, as automotive production dropped in response to the shortage of computer chips. USTMA now expects totals to fall below those of 2019, with passenger OE shipments inching up 1 percent in 2021 from 2020. The light truck tire OE sector is projected to gain 4.6 percent for the year, with truck/bus up a stronger 23.3 percent.

Gains in the market also showed up on the bottom line for many of the tire manufacturers, at least through the year's third quarter. Bridgestone, Goodyear, Pirelli & C. S.p.A., Sumitomo Rubber Industries Ltd. (SRI) and Yokohama Rubber Co. Ltd. reported strong results for both sales and operating profit during the period. Michelin also reported higher sales but didn't disclose earnings.

However, Continental A.G. and Toyo Tire Corp. suffered drops in

operating income despite experiencing higher sales for the period.

Tire manufacturers also weren't shy in planned capital spending for



This year, the tire sector has seen ups and downs from the lingering impacts of COVID-19.

the coming years. In the 12-month period ending in August 2021, tire makers worldwide committed nearly \$7 billion toward new factories and capacity expansions, more than three-fourths of which is earmarked for projects throughout Asia.

The total is roughly \$2 billion more than the amount tracked by *Rubber News* during the August 2019-August 2020 period and includes investments for three greenfield tire factories. The projects represent 53.5 million new units for passenger tires and 6.5 million truck/bus tires, as well as more than 100,000

metric tons of new capacity for farm, industrial and OTR tires.

At the same time, tire makers closed or prepared to close four factories, representing just over 19 million units in annual capacity.

Rising raw material costs, coupled with higher shipping expenses and "changing market conditions," caused some degree of volatility during 2021. All major tire manufacturers have increased prices multiple times—some as many as five times during the year—and a handful already have planned price hikes that will be enacted in early 2022.

### Imports still rising

Despite increased tariffs, imports of tires into the U.S. through the first three quarters of 2021 still are on track to top the record number of tires imported into the U.S. in 2019. That is the case even though imports slowed noticeably during this year's third quarter as supply-chain issues continued to play a factor in moving goods around the world.

While imports are up overall across all categories, the effects of the U.S.' decision earlier this

year to impose elevated import duties on passenger and light truck tires from South Korea, Taiwan and Thailand are readily apparent in the data.

Passenger tire shipments from Taiwan—whose tire makers, in particular, were hit the hardest by the duties—plunged 66.4 percent in the third quarter and 46 percent during the January-September period. On the light truck side, shipments from Taiwan fell 55.2 percent in the first nine months of 2021, dropping Taiwan out of the top 10 sources of such products.

Overall, passenger tire imports were up 16.5 percent through September to 115.5 million units. In the light truck tire category, imports of 25.3 million for the nine-month period were 32.8 percent ahead of 2020 and nearly 28 percent ahead of 2019.

In the medium truck/bus tire category, imports climbed 41.4 percent to nearly 13 million units. Thailand continues to strengthen its status as the No. 1 importer in this sector, boosting shipments to the U.S. by 63.3 percent in the quarter and 58.8 percent for the year-to-date. Thailand's exports to the U.S. through the year's first nine months of 5.22 million units represent more than 40 percent of overall imports, up from 36 percent a year ago.

# Ramping up sustainability efforts

Players in all areas of the rubber industry commit to carbon neutrality

By Sam Cottrill  
Rubber News Staff

According to the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the earth is 1.1°C warmer than it was in the 1800s and is "not on track to meet the Paris Agreement target to keep global temperature from exceeding 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.

"That is considered the upper limit to avoid the worst fallout from climate change," the organization states on its website.

Recent climate reports reveal a bleak future for the planet. But manufacturers and suppliers in the rubber industry display confidence in doing their part to achieve a more sustainable future.

Players big and small in the industry have heeded the call for carbon neutrality by 2050, identifying initiatives to reduce their carbon footprints, such as using renewable energy for powering operations, seeking alternative materials for eco-friendly products, establishing a circular economy with recycled materials and even giving back to local communities.

In October, Silicone supplier Elkem Co. rolled out its "road map" to sustainability that included goals to reduce CO2 emissions by 28 percent from 2020-31 and increase the use of renewable or recycled products by 39 percent, aiming for net-zero emissions by 2050.

The Norwegian company followed up with news of its investment in the "world's first carbon capture pilot for (silicon) smelters."

"Elkem aims to be part of the solution to combat climate change—and to be one of the winners in the green transition," Elkem CEO Helge Aasen said in a statement, adding that the company aims to shape "a better and more sustainable future."

Testing instrument supplier Montech GmbH, which already runs its Buchen, Germany-based factory entirely with renewable energy, told *Rubber News* that it's seeking a 100-percent recycling rate. To achieve this, the firm is looking at several solutions, including minimizing process oils, reusing treated wastewater, recycling all waste material and upgrading machinery to recover energy.

Global Rubber Industries (Pvt.) Ltd., a Colombo, Sri Lanka-based specialty tire maker, rolled out several initiatives to establish an environmentally friendly manufacturing process. This includes using waste material to generate thermal energy, using solar power for electrical energy, recycling water and planting trees, reusing and reclaiming rubber, and more.

Other major tire makers, such as Continental A.G., Bridgestone Americas Inc.,



Michelin, Hankook Tire & Technology, Pirelli & C. S.p.A. and many more, have made similar commitments.

Conti, 150 years in the game with 21 business units and a carbon footprint of 125 million metric tons annually, seeks to be 100-percent carbon neutral, 100-percent emissions-free, achieve a 100-percent circular economy and obtain a 100-percent responsible value chain—all by 2050.

Likewise, Bridgestone and Nokian Tyres P.L.C. are harnessing the power of the sun to achieve their goals of carbon neutrality. Bridgestone said it's targeting a reduction of total CO2 emissions by 2030 for carbon neutrality by 2050.

"As a renewable CO2-free power source, solar power has a significantly smaller impact on the environment compared to other power-generation methods," Andrew Thompson, director of sustainability policy for Bridgestone Americas, previously told *Rubber News*.

And in July, Bridgestone Corp. converted four tire plants in Japan to use 100-percent renewable sources for electricity using hydro, geothermal, solar and/or wind energy.

Nokian, which claims to be the first to power a manufacturing facility with solar power, uses solar for its administration and manufacturing facilities in Dayton, Tenn., achieving Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) v4 certification for the site.

The U.S. Green Building Council awards LEED certification to companies that exhibit some of the highest levels of efficiency and sustainability.

Bridgestone and Nokian also point to a desert shrub, guayule, which yields a natural rubber latex nearly identical to *hevea* NR.

As climate change impacts *hevea* NR

harvests, the desert crop will prove to be a valuable alternative that helps "diversify the world's natural rubber supply and help establish a more sustainable and predictable business path," Thompson said.

Michelin aligned itself with the "Race to Zero" global climate campaign in the fall to support the Paris Agreement goal of limiting the global temperature growth to 1.5°C.

The movement, spearheaded by several organizations including the Science Based Targets Initiative, U.N. Global Impact and We Mean Business, urges political leaders to make the limitation an attainable goal.

And in April, the French tire maker contracted with U.S. engineering firm McDermott International Ltd., bringing it closer to its goal of producing 100-percent sustainable tires by 2050 by producing styrene from plastic waste.

In November, leaders of 10 tire manufacturing companies—including Bridgestone, Goodyear, Michelin, Kumho Tire, Pirelli, Sumitomo Rubber and more—met to validate their ongoing mission of sustainability and to discuss the production of a website to detail TIP goals and progress on tire and road wear particle research, and to share best practices for end-of-life tires.

Scrap tires and recovered carbon black have stepped to the forefront of sustainability initiatives.

The U.S. Tire Manufacturers Association voiced its support of the approximately \$1.2 trillion 2021 Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, signed into law by President Biden on Nov. 15.

With the support of this bill, the association is pushing for the use of reclaimed scrap tires in ground and crumb rubber applications, increasing its use in asphalt and stormwater management.

"We will see a major uptick in crumb

rubber going into roads," said Dick Gust, former president of national account sales and director of government affairs for Liberty Tire Recycling L.L.C. of Pittsburgh and newly named Tire Industry Association CEO. "We have a distinct advantage with this infrastructure bill to where we can build these roads with rubber-modified asphalt. The material is less expensive, and it builds a better road."

As for carbon black, suppliers like Birla Carbon, Tokai Carbon and Cabot Corp. have made their commitments to sustainability.

Birla said in September that it plans to be carbon free by 2050, with efforts focused on circularity with its "Sustainable Carbonaceous Materials" program.

Orion Engineered Carbons this summer launched Ecorax Nature 100, a product derived from renewable, plant-based feedstock.

Earlier this month, Cabot pledged to be carbon neutral by 2050 by following SBTI guidelines. The Boston-based company has an interim goal of reducing emissions by 20 percent by 2025 compared to 2005. In a Dec. 2 press release, the company said it already has realized 77 percent of this goal.

Cabot also completed an emissions reduction project at its Franklin, La., plant last spring. The \$85 million project, the company told *Rubber News*, will reduce daily NOx and SO2 emissions by as much as 20 tons and recover waste heat to generate about 50 megawatts of power—without creating additional emissions.

But sustainability is about more than reducing the carbon footprint.

Canadian carbon black manufacturer, Cancarb Ltd., stepped up its community outreach amidst the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic by partnering with Medicine Hat Food Bank of Alberta to distribute food to residents in need. The company also purchased a greenhouse where it grows produce to donate to the foodbank.

And a Philadelphia startup proved that even small businesses can make a difference, one tire at a time.

Rodney Christian, founder of tire recycling startup Recycledelphia, is investing in his neighborhood with scrap tire education, community beautification and providing opportunity to those who may be "under-skilled and underemployed." Recycledelphia CEO Kimberly Mann told *Rubber News*.

The Philly startup has a three-year plan to educate the community on proper scrap tire disposal and to redirect as many scrap tires as it can to recycling facilities. Recycledelphia said it's aiming to obtain the licensing and equipment it needs in the next three years to recycle the tires it collects and produce its own products.

## 'Made in the USA'

Manufacturers aim to meet demand for domestically produced nitrile gloves

By Sam Cottrill  
Rubber News Staff

Personal protective equipment shortages raged on at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic last year as demand for masks, gloves, gowns and more surged alongside efforts to slow the spread of the highly contagious virus.

While the White House claimed the "worst of the pandemic" was "winding down" in a June update from the Council of Economic Advisors, logistical nightmares within the supply chain continue with the mess that is labor shortages, hiked

prices, delayed shipments, stranded containers and a rapid growth of consumer demand.

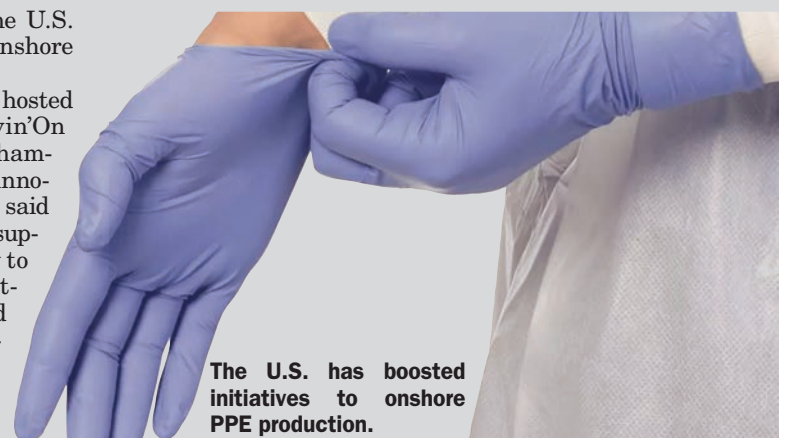
These "horrific challenges," as ChemSpec President and CEO David Moreland had put it at the International Elastomer Conference in Pittsburgh, are found in virtually every market, and companies don't see this supply snafu subsiding anytime soon.

And as U.S. Customs and Border Protection officials have seized disposable gloves over forced labor allegations from companies like Top Glove in March and Supermax

in October, it's no wonder the U.S. has boosted initiatives to onshore PPE production.

During a panel discussion hosted as part of Michelin's Movin'On panel, Francois-Philippe Champagne, Canada's minister of innovation science and industry, said countries are switching from supply chain efficiency mentality to supply chain "resiliency," noting microchips, batteries and biomanufacturing with a prioritization of PPE.

"Never again" is what we  
See **Gloves**, page 17



The U.S. has boosted initiatives to onshore PPE production.



# Gloves

*Continued from page 16*

are saying as a government. 'Never again will we be in the same position,' he had said of supply shortages across markets.

Demand for nitrile gloves is at an all-time high, and most medical gloves come from Southeast Asia, with Malaysia, Thailand and China leading in production.

At the recent International Latex Conference, the International Institute of Synthetic Rubber Producers reported demand for NBR latex is expected to double through 2026.

To prevent a repeat of the PPE shortages that occurred in 2020, rubber manufacturers, with and without federal government support, are increasing production of "Made in America" nitrile gloves as part of a larger push to reduce the country's dependency on foreign PPE.

In March, AirBoss of America Corp. received a tall order of nitrile gloves in the form of a \$576 million contract from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, which Chairman and CEO P. Gren Schoch told *Rubber News* was the largest single glove order the company had received to date.

In May, Fort Worth, Texas-based Rhino Health, a subsidiary of South Korean rubber company

Jungwoo Rubber & Plastics, expanded nitrile glove production and added an additional manufacturing plant in Texas, which the company said will more than triple the nitrile glove production of the firm's existing New Mexico facility.

Also in May, the U.S. Department of Defense, in coordination with the Department of Health and Human Services, awarded Renco Corp. \$13.1 million to increase production capacity of nitrile gloves at its Colebrook, N.H., facility, estimated to increase production by 45.8 million gloves per month by June 2022, according to the government agency.

The DOD modified this days later to a \$35 million contract to also support the company's planned facility in Houston as part of a larger \$200 million-plus investment in several glove manufacturing companies.

As part of this investment, the DOD also awarded \$63.6 million to U.S. Medical Glove Co. L.L.C. for nitrile gloves, which was estimated to increase production by 2.31 billion gloves annually at its Fort Knox, Ky., location by May 2023, and \$123.1 million to Blue Star NBR L.L.C. for increased nitrile butadiene rubber, with an estimated increase in output by 90,000 metric tons by August 2022.

And in June, the department awarded a nearly \$97 million contract to La Verne, Calif., start-up United Safety Technology Inc. with the goal to increase glove

production by 216 million gloves per month by February 2023.

In July, Honeywell International Inc. made a deal with supply chain company Premier Inc., based in Charlotte, N.C., in which Honeywell was to produce 750 million nitrile exam gloves for the supply chain company to purchase and distribute to more than 4,100 hospitals and 200,000 other providers.

Several other companies committed to ramping up a domestic supply of nitrile gloves by the end of the summer.

Thai glove maker Sri Trang, less than two months after its June announcement that it intends to bring glove production to the U.S. with the establishment of a production base, signed a supply deal with Vizient Novaplus to maintain a certain level of onshore inventory.

The company had disclosed that its production base would sit on more than 100 acres and comprise a nitrile glove manufacturing facility, distribution center and warehouse, and an administrative complex. Sri Tang said it expected to reach a manufacturing capacity of 2.5 billion gloves annually in the first year of full production.

Nephron Pharmaceuticals Corp., based in West Columbia, S.C., invested about \$100 million to launch a new business, Nephron Nitrile, to increase glove production with the construction of a new plant, slated for completion in ear-

ly 2022. Nephron said it plans to produce 3 billion gloves annually.

Texas Medical Technology L.L.C. also launched its own subsidiary, iNitrile, in 2020, and this year the company expanded with the construction of a 230,000-sq.-ft., Houston-based glove plant and revolutionized putting out the gloves with a dispensing machine.

Most recently, Blue Star NBR committed to bringing 2,500 new

jobs to Virginia with the construction of a \$714 million multi-facility operation that includes NBR and nitrile glove production facilities.

The company broke ground on construction just last month at Progress Park in Wytheville, Va. The project will occupy more than 200 acres with the potential to triple in size. At full capacity, the facilities are expected to produce 60 billion nitrile gloves annually.



Blue Star NBR broke ground last month on a \$714 million multi-facility operation that includes NBR and nitrile glove production facilities in Wytheville, Va.

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# Leaving a legacy

## Rubber Division chair hopes her leadership inspires others

By Erin Pustay Beaven  
Rubber News Staff

Kim Dempsey-Miller has learned a thing or two about leadership in difficult times. As the 2021 Rubber Division chair, there were plenty of learning opportunities. Because 2021—like the preceding year—provided challenge after challenge.

But Dempsey-Miller was ready. The theme she had chosen to help guide her, proved it: Embrace it when it happens.

“It was funny because when I first sent that (theme to the Rubber Division) ... , it said: ‘Embrace shit when it happens.’ Because shit does happen. And when it gets thrown at you, you handle it,” Dempsey-Miller said with a laugh.

The year that followed the COVID-19 pandemic had quite a bit to throw at the Rubber Division, its chair and the professionals and companies it comprises. New variants of the virus, surges in cases in the U.S. and around the globe, and travel restrictions made the ordinary concept of meeting in person feel extraordinary.

But after going through with an in-person Spring Technical Meeting early in the year, the division opted to do an in-person International Elastomer Conference in the fall. Some questioned the decision, but Dempsey-Miller, the steering committee and Rubber Division leadership were convinced it was the right move.

“We proceeded through the year, unsure a lot of times,” Dempsey-Miller said of having an in-person IEC. “But we finally got to the point where we said, ‘Hey, We’re the Rubber Division. And, if we don’t build it, they won’t come.’”

“So we decided that we needed to put our best foot forward. And we knew it probably wouldn’t be the best year we’ve ever had, and we may even be in the red a little bit, but we need to do this for our membership. So we did it.”

And Dempsey-Miller is the first to say she doesn’t regret the decision.

### A pivotal year

COVID-19 aside, 2021 marked an important year for the Rubber Division, which found itself in the second year of transition.

That transition began with Brian Barkes, 2020 Rubber Division chair, and newly installed Executive Director Lakisha Miller-Barclay. They, along with others in the organization and on the steering committee, recognized that new leadership offered the Rubber Division a chance to redefine itself by looking critically at the work it was doing, defining where it wanted to be and then charting new paths toward its newly articulated vision.

Last year prepared Dempsey-Miller for the challenges of 2021, because Barkes ensured that she played important roles in the decision-making process.

“He allowed me to basically walk with him as he went through the chair,” Dempsey-Miller said. “... We were very close. We, for the first time, sat down and hammered out what we thought should be our expectations for the division, that year. And we communicated those expectations to Lakisha.”

Ultimately that shared vision resulted in the Rubber Division rolling out a new mission statement, new vision and restated set of core values. And all of these, Dempsey-Miller said, point to a broader vision of preparing for a technology-driven future and a diverse, equitable and inclusive industry.

Dempsey-Miller points to the Rubber



Kim Dempsey-Miller, 2021 Rubber Division chair, addresses attendees of the International Elastomer Conference’s opening ceremony and keynote address. The conference was held Oct. 4-7 in Pittsburgh.

Division’s leadership as proof for how the industry is diversifying and growing.

“If you think about it, I was the second female—the first Black female—she (Miller-Barclay) is the first Black executive director, first female executive director,” Dempsey-Miller said. “And this year, we had Duane Dunston as our keynote speaker for the fall. He is the first Black person I have ever seen as a keynote speaker. It was different and I think we each brought a different flavor—a different mix to Rubber Division.”

Bringing new ideas, perspectives and experiences to the table is critical, Dempsey-Miller said. But that can’t happen until a new generation of leaders steps forward. So Dempsey-Miller committed to looking for new, potential leaders and encouraging young professionals to join the Rubber Division.

And what she found, when she looked at the industry with a renewed vision and determination to find the next-generation of Rubber Division leaders, was endless potential for moving forward.

“A year ago, I would have said no, (I don’t see anyone to step up and lead),” Dempsey-Miller said. “But now, I see all the potential in the world. We have hit a pivotal moment and things are different. And believe me, I will be out there shouting from the rooftops: Hey you! Get involved!”

She also has done her best to bring new leaders—both young and experienced professionals—into the fold. Those efforts also resulted in some difficult conversations, particularly with individuals who had spent years in leadership positions with the association.

“We had a serious heart-to-heart discussion this year, and I think maybe a few people felt like (we) were pushing (them) out. ... And, you know, that is not an easy conversation to have, but I think it was important,” Dempsey-Miller said.

“One of the things that I said is that I had no plans to remain in the Rubber Division in an executive capacity. In other words: I don’t necessarily need to be an officer of any sort, I don’t need to be a member of the executive committee. I just want to be able to provide service to the Rubber Division. ... I want to be someone that other people can stand on

the shoulders of.”

### How she’s changed

There are two reasons Dempsey-Miller followed the leadership track that allowed her to become the association’s chair: Joe Walker’s passion and Doug Ruch’s leadership.

For her, the defining moment was when Ruch stopped her in a parking lot

**“I have grown in my ability to listen to other people and to allow their opinions and input to have an impact on me.”**

Kim Dempsey-Miller

after an industry event and asked her if she was interested in helping lead the association. And his timing, she said, couldn’t have been better. Because she had been toying with the idea of getting involved since hearing Walker explain why he got involved with the Rubber Division and why his time as chair meant so much.

“I was so moved by his (Walker’s) passion behind that podium, and I thought: I am going to be the chairperson of this Rubber Division. And, at that point, I think I was only 70 percent serious,” Dempsey-Miller said. “When Doug approached me, I thought it was do it or die.”

Today, Dempsey-Miller admits, she is not the same person that talked to Ruch about the opportunities ahead. She’s wiser, for starters. But she’s also a better leader, a better professional and—most of all—a better listener.

“I have grown in my ability to listen to other people and to allow their opinions and input to have an impact on me,” Dempsey-Miller said. “Sometimes we go to meetings with your own preconceived ideas about things, and you don’t take the opportunity to listen to what other people are saying. I have learned to listen and incorporate that.”

Those who know Dempsey-Miller know she isn’t afraid to speak her mind. And, during her time as chair, she was reminded of why it is important to share ideas, opinions and viewpoints.



Lakisha Miller-Barclay (left) and Kim Dempsey-Miller moderate the ACS Rubber Division’s 2021 Science and Technology Awards.

Moreover, she was reminded how important it is for leaders to be honest and—yes—vulnerable.

### Leaving a legacy

During a Women of the Rubber Division conversation, held virtually in November, Dempsey-Miller talked about the value of transparency. Being honest about your challenges, struggles and victories can deeply impact the lives of other leaders.

What she found is that many—women in particular—have felt the same way she has throughout her career: undervalued, under-appreciated and unheard. There have been moments, she said, where she would go home at the end of a long day and cry out of sheer frustration. And once she had that moment of catharsis, she would take a deep breath, refocus with renewed determination and head back to work the next day with her head held high and her confidence shining through.

“I was very transparent about my involvement in the Rubber Division and my experience in this industry as a woman—and as a Black woman, in particular—and issues of not being credible,” Dempsey-Miller said. “I think that is still on the minds of women—the not being credible—because this is still a male-dominated industry.”

“I have never had a mentor, a professional mentor. I have never been in companies where management would see a new hire and think, ‘that person has potential, I am going to mentor them.’ I have never had that,” she said. “I learned early on that if I was going to do or be anything, I had to rely on myself.”

“In that respect, sometimes, adversity can be your greatest mentor. It can force you to pull your own self up by your bootstraps and learn what you can about yourself to find out what it is you are good at. Then you have to harness that energy and focus and grow yourself.”

Dempsey-Miller doesn’t want anyone to feel alone, unheard or devalued. And she hopes that her leadership through the Rubber Division—and in her career—will help to shape a legacy that allows her to continually impact and encourage others.

“I don’t have to be perfect,” she said. “I don’t have to do fantastic things, but I have to be able to inspire people because that is what I want to do.”

“I want the women who follow behind me to know that they can stand on my shoulders by way of seeing the example that I left,” Dempsey-Miller said. “It is OK to be who you are, it is OK to stand up and say what you think and to know your opinion is as important and as valuable as anyone else’s. So that is the legacy. The legacy is to inspire, support and strengthen those who will follow me.”

# M&A

Continued from page 1

strategic acquisitions, and they are looking to scale up.

What the pandemic did do, though, is shine a bright light on companies' vulnerabilities, and this has helped businesses better identify what acquisitions will make them stronger. This also may help businesses be a little more aggressive on the acquisition front, particularly with today's favorable market dynamics.

"These ideas tend to percolate up when markets are under stress," Wood said. "... When everything is good and you are just cruising along, I don't know that it motivates this kind of thinking. But when you are under stress and you have to do better, something has to happen."

And that's where the pandemic factors in.

Another of the pandemic's peripheral impacts lies in supply chain entanglements.

"One of the things we recently found out—and you know how we have this whole supply chain issue—if you look really hard under the covers, the companies with scale—the ones with clout, the ones who have leverage over the suppliers or buyers—they have fewer problems," Wood said. "... So if you are waiting for a container and you have just one container and it is at the bottom: OK, it's going to stay at the bottom. But if you have scale, you just call up and say, 'it's not waiting at the bottom, it's going now.'"

And that's how scaling up through acquisition can give companies more leverage or diversify their global footprints to shorten the supply chain.

## Who's buying, selling?

Bill Ridenour, owner of Foxfire, N.C.-based Polymer Transaction Advisors Inc., has a clear view of the industry's M&A landscape as he helps his clients find the right opportunities to buy and sell.

Industrywide, there are certain sectors that are more appealing than others, particularly to private equity firms. Companies in the medical and pharmaceutical spaces remain the most appealing targets.

"Whenever we have people call us, they ask if we have a pharmaceutical or a medical company to sell," Ridenour said. "We seldom do because so many of them have been bought out."

Additionally, he said, companies serving the electronics end markets remain coveted.

Perhaps the most interesting space where M&A interest is taking root is in the supply chain space, where supply chain management companies have begun to take off. They operate, Ridenour said, almost in the distribution space, but not entirely.

Supply chain companies work with clients to secure needed raw materials at the best possible prices and then offer warehousing space to expand the available supply of needed materials should a client's supply chain see disruption.

"The benefit to the customer," Ridenour said, "is that they get the best price, favorable sourcing when there is a shortage and they also have the further advantage of being able to warehouse addi-

tional inventory in case something should arise at a supply chain company's plant."

## Perfect timing

So why now? What is it about 2021 that makes it a good time to buy and sell? Ridenour believes that possible changes to tax laws could be influencing some of the year-end activity.

Discussions about increasing tax rates—or eliminating the capital gains tax—continue to move forward in Washington, he said, and any action taken to this end could hinder companies' decisions to grow through acquisition.

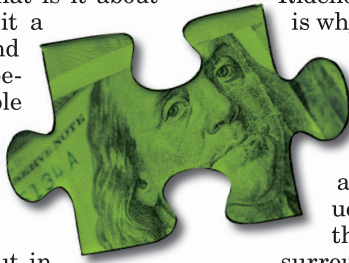
"If the tax increases occur, it

will bring down prices on acquisitions because you won't be getting the after-tax proceeds out of it that you might normally get if you are a private equity group,"

Ridenour said. "So that is why there is a big rush to get the deals done at the end of the year."

Ridenour does believe that M&A activity will continue into 2022, saying the uncertainties surrounding tax policies are likely to impact prices more than the number of transactions.

"One thing I do prophesize is that there will be fewer people in the marketplace," Ridenour said, "which is why the prices will drop. There will be less competition to push the price up. Because



**Bill Ridenour of Polymer Transaction Advisors Inc. expects there to be fewer buyers in the market next year, leading to lower selling prices.**

so many people are getting so concerned about the future, they are going to hunker down and

try to wait and see what happens before they put their money into an investment."

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# Synthomer: Omnova transition goes well despite pandemic

By Bruce Meyer  
Rubber News Staff

PITTSBURGH—When Synthomer P.L.C. closed on its purchase of Omnova Solutions Inc. in 2020, it was just as the cutbacks and restrictions brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic were taking hold.

In fact, the deal—which had an enterprise value of about \$825 million, including such factors as debt assumption—closed on April Fools Day, but it was no joke, quipped Alexandra Diehl, head of sales of performance elastomers in the Americas for Synthomer.

Leading up to the acquisition, the Synthomer board and management traveled regularly to the U.S., and the Omnova board went to its sites around the globe, she said during the recent ACS Rubber Division's International Elastomer Conference in Pittsburgh.

"They were getting ready for the acquisition, understanding production assets and getting to know the people," Diehl said. "We were already prepared while not in the middle of the pandemic."

But then, of course, travel came to a halt and company leadership had to change course, dealing with the transition from afar.

"In hindsight, we were really surprised at how well everything went," she said. "Of course it came with challenges. We had video meetings non-stop."

After spending seven to eight hours a day on those meetings, Diehl said staff would then have to perform its "normal" duties. "It



From left, Robert Gonzalez, Alexandra Diehl, Phil Sheridan and David Hyatt staff the Synthomer booth at the recent International Elastomer Conference.

was a very exhausting time for everyone, but at the same time a very productive time," she said. "We also were surprised at how quickly and efficiently the organization grew and came together."

As a producer of polymers, dispersions and elastomers, Beachwood, Ohio-based Omnova brought eight U.S. manufacturing sites and 13 around the globe. It helped Synthomer become a truly global specialty chemicals company.

"We were competitors before, and we really wanted to expand our global footprint," said Diehl. "Synthomer didn't really have much on the ground in the U.S. That is why Omnova was so attractive."

Synthomer touts itself as one of

the world's top suppliers of aqueous polymers in coatings, construction, textiles, paper and synthetic latex glove industries.

With its global headquarters in London, it has regional centers in Harlow, England; Marl, Germany; Malaysia; and Atlanta. It employs more than 4,750 across 38 global sites, posting annual sales of about \$2.2 billion, according to its website.

Besides its core nitrile rubber latex and SBR latex businesses, Synthomer also supplies a number of performance additive materials utilized in the rubber business.

One is vinyl pirodine latex, used in RFL dips (resorcinol formaldehyde latex), that is used to promote adhesion between cord and rubber,

used extensively in tire production, along with hose and belt production. It is marketed under the Pliocord brand, and produced in France.

Though a number of suppliers are looking to make the RFL dip more environmentally friendly, that involves the formaldehyde side of the equation and shouldn't impact what Synthomer produces for these markets, Phil Sheridan, business development manager for the firm's NBR health and protection business, said at the IEC.

Its Pliolite S6B is a high-styrene resin used to reinforce rubber with improved processing characteristics. Synthomer is the only domestic manufacturer with this particular chemistry, formulated in Akron, which is a big selling point given the current supply chain issues.

It also sells its Chemigum family of material to enhance thermoplastic vulcanizate and polyvinyl chloride materials, with its proprietary Sumigum line also used to boost these materials.

"When it comes to performance additives, we're looking at enabling product performance, processing efficiencies, and cost and use enhancements to rubber, PVC and TPEs," Sheridan said. "We work really closely with customers to tailor specific solutions to meet performance requirements."

In addition, Synthomer is investing in a plant in the United Kingdom that makes liquid polybutadiene under the Lithene

brand, a material that improves compression set and heat aging, among other benefits.

Diehl said the transition was a bit rocky because of supply chain constraints that have dominated 2021. "We know how to deal with imports pretty well," he said. "We have been importing all of our lives, but what we have seen this last year, no one has ever seen it before."

"Everyone is dealing with the same circumstances and products," she said. "Other than that, because of all the video exchanges, the customers have adapted to it as well."

With no end in sight to the supply chain crisis, Synthomer is using Southern ports when possible, using rail delivery and signing new contracts with trucking companies that may cost more but provide increased security.

"We had situations where we had raw materials three hours away from us and we had to wait three weeks because we couldn't find truckers," she said. "We will pay more money to make sure things improve."

Sales for Synthomer have been strong, and the firm has been able to service customers, though not always on the expected date.

"We have very high expectations," Diehl said. "It's never really a full fulfillment unless you straighten out the issues you're dealing with. Under the circumstances, everything has been going exceptionally well."

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# Fostering a sense of ownership, pride at Mechanical Rubber

By Andrew Schunk

Rubber News Staff

WARWICK, N.Y.—Mechanical Rubber Co. Inc. CEO Cedric Glasper makes a clear distinction between management and leadership.

Whereas management can have parameters in its application, leadership is transitory, selfless and without confines.

Both are crucial to a company's success, says Glasper, the 2021 *Rubber News* Executive of the Year, much like the spokes and hub are essential for a wheel.

But leadership qualities, by nature, are the bounty of everyone, passed along through action and behavior, accordingly.

They are the intangibles that earned Glasper the honor, and not coincidentally they are the guidelines by which many of his employees operate.

Lisa Rice, in aerospace and defense sales and marketing at Mechanical Rubber, has worked with Glasper for a decade. She cites his ability to “be part of the team while at the same time being a leader,” a teacher who pushes his employees to be better.

“He is an educator and someone who fosters people to step out of their comfort zone to try new

things,” Rice told *Rubber News*. “Under his encouragement, I have learned web design, cybersecurity and graphic arts—things I would not have dreamed I would be able to master a decade ago.

“Cedric bolsters a sense of ownership among the staff—the feeling that Mechanical Rubber's successes are our own. I was so glad to hear that Cedric was receiving the honor of being named Executive of the Year. It is well-deserved.”

Tim Richardson, a Mechanical Rubber employee in the Richmond, Calif., sales office, calls the CEO and his friend of more than 25 years “a super success story.”

“He has worked very hard to make Mechanical Rubber a successful company and a rewarding experience for his employees and family,” Richardson said. “Cedric will continue to be successful because of his diligence and hard work.

“Congratulations on the accolade and well deserved.”

A tooling engineer at Mechanical Rubber Ohio in Strongsville, Dale Lohrke does not have the tenure of Rice and Richardson at the seal, gasket and custom contracting manufacturer, but said he is proud of the company's



From left, Mechanical Rubber employees Walter Scott, Dan Dalton, Danny Miranda and Dale Lohrke test the company's new 50-foot autoclave.

accomplishments since he started two years ago.

He credits Glasper with giving employees the autonomy and independence they need to be successful.

“I enjoy the culture and atmosphere that he has established and cultivated, and I am proud to have such a great boss,” Lohrke said. “His vision for the future is what we're working toward, and I look forward to working here for many more years.”

A “passion for everything rubber” is what has impressed

Dan Dalton about Glasper. Dalton also works at the 80,000-sq-ft. Strongsville location.

“It does not surprise me that Cedric has become the Executive of the Year,” Dalton said. “I have witnessed firsthand his immense drive to succeed on top of a deep knowledge and passion for everything rubber. He has given our plant new life along with a multitude of opportunities.

“I look forward to our continued growth under his leadership for many years to come.”

Mechanical Rubber has made

several acquisitions since Glasper purchased the company in 1995, the last being Durox Co., a former Wabtec company, in early 2020.

Nicole Cosimano, who handles customer relations for the entirety of Mechanical Rubber, said each purchase has increased the company's capabilities, offering a wider reach into rail and transit applications, specifically, in addition to what it already offers the aerospace and defense industries.

“Cedric's determination, motivation and inspiration inspire us all,” she said. “Cedric, I wish you continued success because you have earned it.”

Walter Scott, a maintenance worker at Mechanical Rubber Ohio, offered a heartfelt testimonial as he was present in 1995 during the watershed moment for the upstate New York business.

“Cedric Glasper saw potential in a company that no one else saw the opportunity in,” Scott said. “Several other companies came through and decided we were not worth the time and effort to rebuild.

“He took a company that had recently lost over 100 employees and the railroad division, and turned it into the successful company Mechanical Rubber is today.”

## Glasper

Continued from page 1

Rubber in quality compliance for 14 years, said she has learned much under Glasper's leadership.

“I consider him a friend as well as a great boss,” Sherow said. “I have always been encouraged to be the best I can be. I am continually amazed by the up-to-date knowledge of Cedric in this field. He is always willing to consult on questions related to the rubber industry ... and the many specifications and requirements that our customers request.

“Cedric works harder than anybody I have ever met, which is why the company is so successful. Employees want to emulate his honesty and integrity.”

Glasper last was featured in *Rubber News* for his efforts toward a more diverse manufacturing floor, and is the first person of color to be honored as the publication's Executive of the Year.

He has led Mechanical Rubber since 1995, through the ups and downs of mergers and acquisitions, a global pandemic, rampant inflation and the turbulence of supply line challenges. Through sharp business acumen, Glasper has the company on pace to double its sales in 2022, without even considering the benefits to come from the infrastructure bill recently signed by President Biden.

“As we speak, next year we are potentially close to doubling our sales, and this (estimate) is without the infrastructure bill, which I was greatly looking forward to passing,” Glasper said. “If we can get a second shift going in Ohio, as is the plan next year, this should reduce lead times and catch overflows.

“All of this is organic, through our existing customers.”

### Listening and learning

When Glasper would watch his mother, Lillian, on the phone in the kitchen of their Missouri home in the 1970s, there was a lot of head-nodding and “uh-huh ...



Mechanical Rubber prides itself on custom compounding for its seals and gaskets.

yes, tell me more ... uh-huh, I see.”

“I would ask her, ‘Who are you talking to? Why weren't you saying anything?’ And she replied that most of the time people just want you to listen. They don't need you to solve their problems, they just want you to listen.”

Like the tools-of-the-trade epiphany gleaned from his father, Glasper said his mother taught him the art of quiet, purposeful listening.

Lillian Glasper worked at Lincoln Co., now SKF Lincoln, a lubrication systems and instrument company that remains known for its well-made grease guns. Like Hazelwood, the Lincoln production facility where Lillian worked was just outside St. Louis.

“And that was a big moment for me,” Glasper said. “To my parents' credit, they talked—and listened—to anyone and everyone, and they went anywhere and everywhere in their travels. They still do now, even in their 80s.”

While Ted Glasper was a Teamster, Lillian was a member of the United Auto Workers. The fighting union spirit pervaded the Glasper home, and the virtues of union membership continue to shape Cedric Glasper today, he said, though Mechanical Rubber is not a union shop.

“So, it was pretty clear what circles we fit into growing up,” he said. “My father also had the philosophy to move every seven to 10 years, staying ahead of the riff raff and keeping the equity in the house growing.”

Glasper has lived in the inner city, suburbs and rural areas, all of which added to his ability to communicate seamlessly with those from all walks of life, color and creed.

“My brother still travels ad nauseum, and my sister started a tutoring school that is now accredited,” he said. “She really knows business.”

From Hazelwood, Glasper attended the University of Missouri at Columbia in mechanical engineering, though his ultimate career goal remained a mystery to him at that point.

“During undergraduate work I had to take calculus, and that became a little—no, a lot—hard for me,” he said. “I remember I had a 7 a.m. Fortran class and it was like they were speaking Greek. I just wasn't ready for it.”

A spring break trip to visit his brother serving in the U.S. Air Force at Norton Air Force Base (closed in 1994) in San Bernardino, Calif., was particularly important, as the location “was the prettiest thing I have ever seen in my life, with the fog blowing out,” Glasper said.

It became an immediate goal to move there, and after saving money by working odd part-time jobs while attending university, he did just that.

“It was then that I learned that you could do more than one thing at a time,” he said, emulating his father, who cut grass and worked other jobs in addition to his full-time work with UPS. “We always had a work ethic in our family where you got out of bed and you went to work. No exceptions.”

The move after graduation at Columbia took Glasper to California Polytechnic State University, where he majored in urban planning.

“It was either that or landscape architecture, and I found out you had to learn Latin with that degree—no thanks,” he said.

Glasper was hired out of college in the early 1990s by the Itran-Tompkins Rubber Corp., a bonded metal and custom-molded rubber company based in New Jersey—and he moved again, this time from his bucolic San Bernardino setting to a hard-scrabble section of New Jersey, “where it was gray and dismal-looking.”

This was in 1995.

“1995 was huge,” Glasper said. “New Jersey is a little different than most places to get around in.”

He was about an hour-and-a-half outside Manhattan, in his 30s, wide-eyed with ambition and imbued with equal parts fear and excitement at the prospect of purchasing his first company.

A company called Mechanical Rubber, based in Warwick, N.Y., had filed for bankruptcy, and its molding and extrusion operations were purchased by Itran-Tompkins. Glasper saw the die-cutting operations at Mechanical Rubber as his chance to strike out on his own.

“(The purchase) was entirely based on fear,” he said. “At the time I was developing a philosophy about fear, which will make you do one of two things—either stand still or move.

“And being that I didn't know what I didn't know, I only knew that standing still was not going to work for me. For my mother or father, becoming a manager would have been the pinnacle for them. And for awhile, that was my world.

“I know I can manage. In time, I learned about leadership and management, and the difference between the two. With leadership, you are further out in the great beyond, so to speak. You are the visionary. I have always had the drive to pair with the vision, and that has kind of been my sweet spot in putting the two together.

“Now I can see the players in the industry—and I can see my industry, and I can see it absolutely.”

### A brief history of Mechanical Rubber

With its pedigree in defense applications, Mechanical Rubber began in 1941 and evolved with the wars of the 20th century, manufacturing custom rubber and plastics products for the aerospace, military, transit and industrial markets.

Currently, Mechanical Rubber's defense contracts include seal and gasket production, and sound- and vibration-damping equipment. The company fabricates sheet rubber for the Boeing AH-64 Apache attack

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# Glasper

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helicopter, as well as the Boeing CH-47 Chinook heavy lift and transport helicopter, both of which are flown by the U.S. Army.

The company was chosen in 2017 as a supplier for mounting pads for the International Space Station, after NASA engineers discovered a Mechanical Rubber compound that met their strict requirements for space applications.

And historically, Mechanical Rubber played a small part in NASA's iconic Apollo 11 moon landing mission in July 1969, supplying a high pressure window gasket for the Lunar Excursion Module.

The company currently maintains contracts with Airbus, Lockheed, Sikorsky and Gulfstream, among many others on the aviation side, according to the company's website.

Only since the early 2020 acquisition of Durox Co., a former Wabtec company, has Mechanical Rubber seen its rail and transit sales increase, assisted by a \$3 billion investment announced last year by Amtrak Corp. Durox products, with the brand still intact, are manufactured at the Ohio location.

"We needed to wrap our arms around that (Amtrak investment)," Glasper said. "In April we became one of the top three (rubber product) providers for the rail industry."

At the end of 2019, Mechanical Rubber branched out to the West Coast, with plans for both a manufacturing site as well as corporate offices in Richmond, Calif. Thus far only the sales office is up and running, with the delay in setting up production a casualty of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"We found the right fit in California," he said. "The project is alive but dormant. When we discussed (the Richmond site) recently, cooler heads prevailed and we are going to be patient. We have retained some really good

prospects (in aerospace and defense) there."

The Strongsville location is celebrating one year this winter, and sales were excellent there in the first and second quarters of 2021, Glasper said. Mechanical Rubber Ohio is up 3 percent year-to-date (boosted by rail and transit) and the New York location has been running flat thus far.

"The first quarter of 2021 was the best first quarter in a long time," Glasper said. "The second quarter for Ohio was phenomenal. We were rocking and rolling."

But the pandemic already had begun to take its toll.

The first Glasper heard of it, he was walking through LAX at the end of 2019, and a case of the no-longer-novel coronavirus was reported at the airport.

It marked the last time he was at the Richmond office. Adding to the chaos, the Durox acquisition was just around the corner in the new year.

"By the time the ink had dried on the documents I signed (with the acquisition of Durox), I still did not know how the two companies would be integrated," Glasper said. "How much time would be required? I had about a 24-hour period of panic that I had not experienced before."

Fortunately, Mechanical Rubber was deemed an essential company, and the acquisition foretold a promising future, led by a CEO with a Jeffersonian philosophy.

"You have to get to a certain vantage point before you can get to the next point—because you can't see that far from the first one," Glasper said. "That's where I am now, that next hill."

Supply chain problems and pricing volatility for the materials that Mechanical Rubber uses—namely silicone, FKM, natural rubber and EPDM—are dogging the company, just as they have frustrated so many other manufacturers.

"You can try to reformulate using similar compounds, but one cake is always going to be different from another," Glasper said.



**Mechanical Rubber, which has supplied parts to NASA and the International Space Station, counts Airbus, Lockheed, Sikorsky and Gulfstream among its customers.**

Strong customer relationships—via the communication skills that have become a Glasper hallmark—and a multi-supplier philosophy have buoyed Mechanical Rubber through the down times.

"But the world has gotten much smaller," Glasper cautioned. "There have been major mergers and acquisitions, *force majeure* and the shuttering of plants.

"Sometimes we don't get the attention we should get, but there is always someone bigger than you. My concern going forward is to create a self-sustaining enterprise, and I won't be happy until I get there. With this, you can respond one way or another to every prospect's needs—through molding, splicing, fabrication ... the whole nine yards."

**Hiring problem: A societal issue?**

Mechanical Rubber is considered a mid-sized company, though Glasper noted that "to the government, we are small ... and to the bank, we are small."

He is in the process of connecting with JobsOhio, an economic development agency in Columbus, to start a second shift at the Strongsville location.

But the hiring and retention problems are real, and the causes, Glasper said, go far beyond any work force lethargy generated by government subsidies issued during the pandemic.

"Birth rates, immigration, education, opportunity—all of these are causes of this," he said. "There are a lot of people (working) off the books everywhere. It goes back to civil rights and the quest for equal opportunities for jobs, as well as fair treatment on the job and opportunities within the job for advancement."

"Unions have been broken and there is more competition, and there is offshoring."

On the family level, Glasper noted the lack of emotional and financial support that can exist in broken homes.

"We have had a 40- to 50-year race to the bottom," he said. "It occurs slowly, like watching the grass grow. Before you know it, an entire generation of people have been disenfranchised. Eventually you just start to kill people's hope."

"Then you go where you feel loved and appreciated—but it's never a positive movement. The prison system has removed millions of people—and their intellectual capital—from the work force. And we just gave this away."

Glasper noted that opportunities "were slim to none" outside of St. Louis, not far from Ferguson.

"People finally erupted (in Ferguson). If you don't give a person an opportunity to feed his family, what do you think you are going to get?" Glasper said. "When I hire, not everything is plug-and-play. I have to work with the person to fit in, and we tend to bring people on board slowly."

Within the last year, Mechanical Rubber has hired several engineers and quality control employees, but manufacturing floor jobs remain a difficult proposition.

Glasper tends to fall back on a known quantity—the listening skills learned from his mother—to gauge worker morale.

"I tend to just try and listen," he said. "I'm listening to the shortcomings of the company,

yes, as I am a strong proponent of customer satisfaction, but I am also listening to those worker relationships and their problems."

**Promoting diversity**

Rubber may be in just about every facet of daily life, but minorities in the rubber industry—especially at the executive level—can be a rare commodity.

Glasper told *Rubber News* earlier this year that he "does not spend a lot of time thinking about being Black."

"I don't spend a lot of time focusing on the fact I am Black," he said. "I know who I am. I'm fine with that. What I focus on is my competitor or my adversary, and they are the opportunity."

Glasper said he does not have a quota or threshold he tries to meet in hiring those with diverse backgrounds, no "Rooney Rule" to which he adheres. Rather, he focuses on those with diverse thought processes.

"If you can check the boxes in the interview—and we typically have about a 50-50 male-to-female ratio—I can only interview those who apply," he said. "I work very hard to put the right people in the right place with the right tools, and things will flow. People are already motivated. You just need to find what people need to be even better—and that requires listening."

Mentorship is important in any stage of life, and can be crucial for minorities breaking in to an industry that too often is monochromatic.

"How fast can you learn, and are you willing to do it? Do you have the stomach for it? How much can you handle? How much of yourself are you willing to give?" he asked.

Citing "Why Should White Guys Have All the Fun?" by Reginald Lewis, Glasper said the chief barrier in anyone's life is herself.

"It is all about perception," he said. "Lewis was acquiring companies he knew nothing about—but he figured it out. There is no book, there is no manual. Every enterprising situation is different."

"You need to leave the house, leave the block and talk to others. Just because it is not comfortable or you cannot relate to something is not good enough. You have to go outside yourself, outside the norm."

The waters are going to be rough, Glasper said, filled with the concerns that accompany a dearth in qualified industry applicants, a global pandemic and supply line difficulties.

Handling such challenges from the top can require blinders, a head-down attitude that pushes a company, for better or for worse, through the tough times.

"Does a comet look at its tail, at its own destruction? The comet is busy going where it's going," Glasper said. "If you have a plan to keep going ... to keep going ... to get to that end result, that is what matters."

"How fast can I get through it? I know there are rough patches. Sometimes it's two steps forward, one step back. But we are making progress, right? Let the failures germinate a bit—maybe take another two steps back—but keep moving. You can use fear to your advantage."

"The water is going to be rough. What will you do in response?"

Rubber News <i>Executive of the Year</i>	
Rubber News Executive of the Year 2021	
Cedric Glasper, Mechanical Rubber Co. Inc.	
<b>2020</b>	<b>2004</b>
Tom Pitstick, Gates Corp.	Thomas A. Dattilo, Cooper Tire & Rubber Co.
<b>2019</b>	<b>2003</b>
P. Gren Schoch, AirBoss of America Inc.	Donald E. Morel Jr., West Pharmaceutical Services
<b>2018</b>	<b>2002</b>
William Stockwell, Stockwell Elastomerics	John Lampe, Bridgestone/Firestone
<b>2017</b>	<b>2001</b>
Rick Valeriot, Poly-Nova Technologies	Walter J. Morris, Morris Latex Products
<b>2016</b>	<b>2000</b>
Steve Anton, Rahco Rubber Inc.	Neil Tillotson, Tillotson Corp.
<b>2015</b>	<b>1998</b>
Linda Katz, Molded Dimensions Inc.	Masatoshi Ono, Bridgestone/Firestone
<b>2014</b>	<b>1997</b>
Richard D. Selip and Joseph A. Misinec, Grand River Rubber & Plastics Co.	Charles R. Wright, Denman Tire
<b>2013</b>	<b>1996</b>
James Hawk, Toyo Tire & Rubber Co.	Richard D. Selip, Grand River Rubber & Plastics Co.
<b>2012</b>	<b>1995</b>
James McElya, Cooper-Standard	Maurice Taylor Jr., Titan Wheel International
<b>2011</b>	<b>1994</b>
Douglas A. DeCamp, Flexfab Horizons International	Stanley C. Gault, Goodyear
<b>2010</b>	<b>1993</b>
Edward L. Bittle, Seal Master/Elbex	Joseph C. Day, Freudenberg-NOK
<b>2009</b>	<b>1992</b>
Chuck Chaffee, BRC Rubber & Plastics	Joel D. Marvil, Ames Rubber
<b>2008</b>	<b>1991</b>
Steve Barton, Kirkhill Rubber Co.	Jim Reid, Standard Products
<b>2007</b>	<b>1990</b>
Daniel Hertz Jr., Seals Eastern	Michael A. Plumley, Plumley Companies
<b>2006</b>	<b>1989</b>
Kevin E. Gray, Lauren International	Stanley C. Gault, Rubbermaid
<b>2005</b>	
Lee Carver, Sil-Pro	Ivan Gorr, Cooper Tire & Rubber Co.

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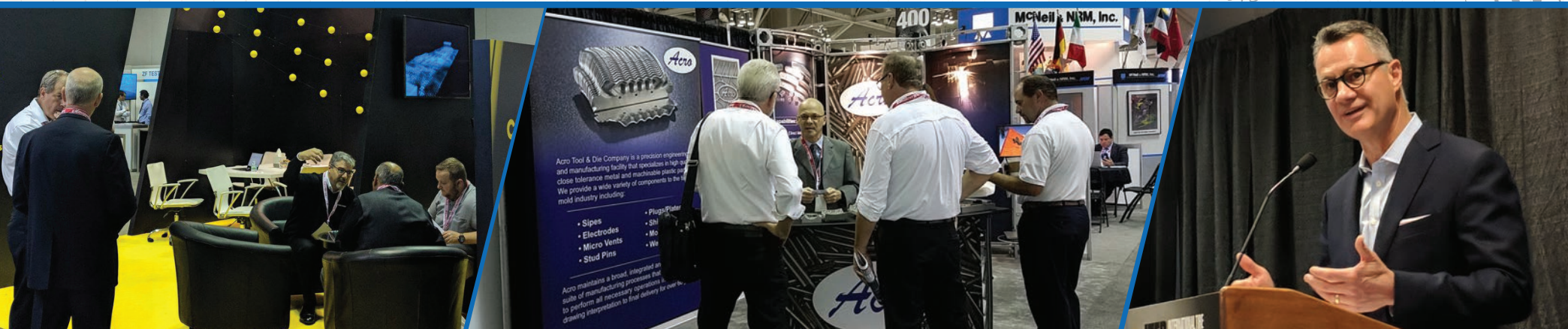


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