Tree House

Advance Packaging Corp.’s Green Focused Facility Earns Sustainability Excellence Award

Picture your dream house. Beautiful, isn’t it? Maybe it has acres and acres of room, a pond on the property and a view of the mountains. Maybe it is on a mountain, with a panoramic deck to look around and an isolated trail nearby for skiing and hiking. Maybe it’s beachfront, with the ocean not 10-ft. from its kitchen window.

But how many solar panels does it have? What’s its carbon footprint? Are its materials sustainably sourced? How does it impact the surrounding area?

How many people, given the chance to build their dream home, would consider its sustainability? Most would not, but Advance Packaging Corp. is not “most.” In 2005, the FTA member broke ground on a massive 425,000 sq. ft. manufacturing space in Grand Rapids, MI. Unlike some companies who use the occasion of a new building to include excesses like foosball tables or a break room filled with beanbag chairs, Advance Packaging took the opportunity to “create a facility that would shrink our environmental footprint even as it allowed our physical, production and geographic footprints to grow,” according to its Sales & Marketing Analyst Catherine Cole.

By choosing to go above and beyond in its consideration of the environment and its dedication to sustainably focused business operations, Advance Packaging Corp. was presented with Flexographic Technical Association’s 2015 Sustainability Excellence Award.

Commenting on the win, Cole says, “Our employees are proud of the new facility and of the work we do in terms of sustainability. Advance Packaging has entered and won printing competitions with FTA, but that only highlights a very small part of who we are as a company. The printing awards are shared by our graphics department and press crew. The Sustainability Excellence Award can be shared by everyone, because we all are part of the effort.”

DIG IT

Advance Packaging turns 50 next year. Since its founding in 1966, it has remained committed to delivering quality corrugated packaging. On the eve of its 40th anniversary, amid a push into the world of graphic and retail packaging and as its current facility was being quickly outgrown, the company set out to build a new space. A site near crucial railways was discovered, meeting size and location

The company’s Mastronardi Produce Gourmet Greenhouse Vegetables Tray won a best of show designation at the 2012 Excellence in Flexography Awards.
requirements. However, being covered in nearly 1.5 acres of wetlands, the space had long been vacant.

At the same time it was mulling over details of its future facility, Advance Packaging’s Owners, Don Crossley and Carol Hoyt, along with its then VP of Manufacturing Mike Sylvester, set out to build an efficient and environmentally responsible facility.

The company saw an opportunity to aid the community, provide additional resources to the wetlands and secure its desired location for a new facility. Advance Packaging relocated the wetlands to another location and proceeded to add nearly another half acre to it. The company notes its commitment to complying with the Clean Water Act and National Environmental Policy Act during the relocation.

Over the course of the five years following the wetlands project, monitoring service JFNew periodically visited and studied the site. At the end of that time, the company produced a report detailing its findings. Among the conclusions:

- Measurements indicated a “good quality mitigation wetland”
- Species diversity improved, with 61 native and 74 wetland indicator types present
- Agricultural weeds previously present at the site had been replaced with wetland varieties
- Vegetation was established throughout the area

“Advance Packaging took great care to utilize the wetlands running through its property, creating vigorous pollution prevention programs,” commented Dolores Corcoran, productivity system manager at Lauterbach Group. “The five year commitment to the wetland mitigation shows Advance Packaging’s true pledge toward environmental sustainability and the continuous efforts to refurbish waste demonstrated why the company was selected for the 2015 Sustainability Excellence Award.”

A SUSTAINABLE SANCTUARY

With a space it could now build on, Advance Packaging went to work creating its new sustainable building. The floorplan was designed to minimize human contact with sheets, achieved by placing the corrugator machines, converting machines and shipping docks in optimal spots. Conveyor lines were implemented and energy is used sparingly and only when needed to move a product along.

As Cole points out, the No. 1 natural gas use in a corrugated plant is a boiler that generates steam for the corrugating process. Looking to reduce that as much as possible, Advance Packaging purchased a 110-in. BHS corrugator. The size enables the company to produce more paper and use less gas while doing it. Above the new corrugator, Advance Packaging installed barriers and tubes to capture and distribute the heat generated during production. In the winter, that heat warms the plant and in the summer, it gets vented out of the facility. In both scenarios, energy costs are reduced.

Hard numbers show the true effect: In 2005, the last full year in its old plant, Advance Packaging used 46,941-ccf. (centum cubic feet)
of natural gas and produced 646,000-msf. (thousand square feet) of corrugated material. Two years later, in its first 12 months at the new plant, gas use dropped to 41,497-ccf. while corrugated production rose to 734,000-msf.

“Advance Packaging understands that a strong sustainability program makes sense not just for the environment, but for long term viability of the company as well,” said Marygrace Quigley, customer communications manager at Label Technology.

CONTINUOUS CONCERN

Advance Packaging is no stranger to the environment and the impact a company can have on it. “Advance Packaging Corp. understands that clean manufacturing, the development of people, and economic stability are keys to long term viability,” reads its Corporate Sustainability Statement. “We are committed to invest the resources necessary to remain a competitive, ethical and socially responsible enterprise.” Long before “going green” became a popular thing to do, it was concerned with sustainability—as far back as the 1980s, when Cole says the push for recycled content affected the entire paper industry.

“When we built the new plant, we also purchased several new machines, and the newer technology uses far less energy than its older counterparts,” she notes. “There is certainly a growing awareness of sustainability, and our community is very involved with the movement, but the biggest reason we’ve taken the steps we have is because we genuinely believe it is our responsibility.”

Beyond its eco friendly new facility, Advance Packaging is also certified with the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) and only purchases from paper suppliers who comply with SFI standards. The company also instituted what it calls a “cooler corrugating philosophy” in 2010. By keeping paper temperatures below 212 degrees Fahrenheit, there is less waste due to over drying. And this year it will introduce a sustainability program. “After all, the public’s education carries the public to become more cognizant of the importance of recycling and energy efficiency measures,” said Anoosheh M. Oskouian, president and CEO of Ship & Shore Environmental, Inc. “After all, the public’s education carries a large weight on sustaining the initial measures and success of the program.”

But moving and pouring resources into the wetlands project did not positively affect Advance Packaging’s bottom line—the company makes money printing corrugated boxes, not caring about the environment. Simply put, that project wasn’t designed to generate revenue. Instead, it serves as the most obvious example of a genuine awareness of the environment, the impact a single company can have—positive and negative—and a commitment to doing what’s possible to do more good than harm, not to pad the books, but because it’s the right thing to do.

“A as a corrugated manufacturer, we rely heavily on Earth’s natural resources—namely trees,” Cole says. “We want to be around to provide packaging long into the future. That means taking care of our community so we have employees, our economic viability, and the resources we need to produce our product.

Cole admits that sustainability does make business sense. The 22 percent drop in natural gas usage when compared to the amount of corrugated material produced is proof of that, as are savings from producing less waste and consuming less energy.

It also benefits the community, of which Advance Packaging is a part. Cole points out that her company’s hometown of Grand Rapids is also home to many other sustainably minded businesses. Working toward common goals makes the city and surrounding area “a great place to live and work.” Investing in employees, the community, and local environment means a strong workforce and the availability of resources.

“In detailed review of Advance Packaging submission for this year’s Sustainability Excellence Award, it was observed the company made a serious attempt in not only implementing various measures, but also engaging the work force and educating the public to become more cognizant of the importance of recycling and energy efficiency measures,” said Anoosheh M. Oskouian, president and CEO of Ship & Shore Environmental, Inc. “After all, the public’s education carries a large weight on sustaining the initial measures and success of the program.”

Learn more about Advance Packaging Corp’s sustainability efforts at www.advancepkg.com.