



## 2007 Innovator of the Year

Steve Jesnek, WMIA member and Stiles Machinery director of dealer development, in announcing the 2007 Innovator of the Year Award recipient said, "Year after year the Innovator Award acknowledges industry leadership in 'out-of-the-box' approaches to succeeding in a business environment that is difficult in the best of times. Sometimes successful innovation comes not just from being in the forefront of technology, or in creatively innovative uses of that technology, but from creatively innovative responses to a changing marketplace."

While OFC Panel Processing's use of high-tech equipment certainly has enabled it to broaden its customer base and expand its capabilities, Jesnek said, "It is the company management's recognition of the need to respond to changing customer opportunities and challenges, and its will to do so, that secures its position as an outstanding woodworking industry innovator."

OFC, founded in 1990 as a two-person custom furniture and cabinet company, left the niche after it was approached in 1995 by a major office furniture manufacturer to provide furniture panel components. That business grew to such a degree that OFC gave up its local custom furniture and cabinet business, but still recognized the need to expand its customer base.

Beginning in 2001, with the purchase of a high-tech machining center and edgebander, it grew significantly in capability, quality and efficiency. By 2002 it had grown to 60 employees and in 2006 incorporated lightweight panels, including honeycomb, into its product mix.

It is now able to provide a large mix of parts in small volume as a just-in-time provider of short-run components to smaller manufacturers of millwork, store fixtures and displays, for example. By building prototypes and helping to develop product lines, OFC contributes in a major way to help customers' business growth. Often with the resulting success and growth, these customers bring their component manufacturing in house. But, Jesnek noted, "With true innovator's spirit, OFC recognizes that while it will lose that customer, it will gain others."

Charlie Olswold, OFC Panel Processing's CEO, accepted the award.