



2008 Innovator of the Year

According to James Madsen, WMIA member and a Stiles Machinery sales engineer, "For 21 years the WMIA Innovator Award has celebrated industry leadership and companies producing innovative, unique commercial wood products by implementing innovative approaches to the manufacturing of wood-based products. A company receiving this award also is one that has integrated high-technology equipment enabling it to increase its profitability and competitiveness in the marketplace.

"Paladin Industries, a family-owned woodworking and panel processing company founded by Larry and Barbara Bell in 1984, has unquestionably satisfied these criteria through its investment in high-technology equipment and innovation in its usage. As a result, it virtually owns its industry niche, that of providing components to the automotive industry, such as robot-sanded solid maple and walnut shift knobs, that most manufacturers neither want to deal with nor have the capacity to produce."

Noting that the company began with a single spindle router, Madsen said "Today the company encompasses a 54,000-square-foot building that pushes the woodworking envelope with unique router and bander projects with five-axis woodworking jobs requiring elaborate pneumatic clamping fixtures and membrane pressing of very challenging profiles. A single robot with a two-position station has reduced the number of people involved in the knob-sanding process from eight to four, and reduced sanding time from five or six minutes to two.

"The entire process required innovative fixturing, diamond insert, insert router and end-of-arm robot tooling, all conceptualized and designed by Paladin's Engineering Group and an investment of time and resources typical of the Bell's and their dedicated team.

Larry Bell, Paladin's CEO and co-founder, accepted the award.