

## **2008 Commitment to Excellence through Technology Awards**

In the fourth year since WMIA's Commitment to Excellence through Technology Award was established, for the first time there were two winners. Both are companies that have demonstrated consistent growth in their market segments and attribute their on-going history of investing in WMIA-member-supplied high-technology equipment to contributing significantly to their respective success and profitability.

Jerry Hilgefert, WMIA member and president of Hilgefert Woodworking Machinery Co., said, "In my 40 years of selling woodworking machinery, I have yet to find another firm with the philosophy and commitment to improving its competitiveness in the marketplace than the Jasper Chair Company.

"It was founded in 1921, survived the Great Depression and grew to be a leader in the solid wood seating arena, supplying libraries, schools and the restaurant industry. During the past 15 years its management has demonstrated an outstanding commitment to improve and provide a consistent quality standard, increasing productivity while strengthening interaction and cooperation among its 95 employees. Its facility now consists of 23,000 square feet of lumber processing areas, an 185,000 -square-foot manufacturing area, and 38,000 square feet of warehouse capacity. It produces more than 130,000 units annually.

Hilgefert said, "Through prudent capital investments in innovative and high-technology equipment in virtually every department – from the lumber yard through finishing – Jasper Chair thrived and continues to achieve its goals of growth and profitability in a challenged industry. Many of its CNC woodworking machines were the first to be installed in the region and even the country.

"This truly unique company continues to improve its position in the marketplace through its capital investments in high technology equipment. In other words, through it's unequivocal to commit to excellence through technology, to maintaining its stable and loyal workforce, and to not resorting to imported wood components in its products" The award was accepted by Jeff Barth, Jasper Chair's vice president.

Brian Stiles, WMIA member and Stiles Machinery sales engineer, noted that in WMIA President Tom Reiser's opening remarks he noted that one of the Wooden Globe recipients has taken the "Re-Engineering, Re-Tooling and Re-Education" message to heart. "The second winner of the Commitment to Excellence through Technology Award is Custom Cupboards Inc.

"The company was founded in 1981 by brothers Dan and Ron Henry to design, build and sell custom kitchen and bath cabinetry. From starting in a 2,000-square-foot building outfitted with Dan's personal tools – a table saw and a radial arm saw – the company grew until it is now housed in a manufacturing facility comprising 217,500 square feet. The vertically integrated facility produces approximately 385 framed cabinets a day in two shifts with 175 door combinations available in 850 standard colors and eight different wood species.

"Custom Cupboards has embraced WMIA's 'Three Rs' in every aspect of its operations. It has Re-Engineered its processes as well as its products. Recent solutions include a custom factory software system that has helped it become one of the first wood products manufacturers to use an RFID tagging system which tracks parts through the factory as well as drive specific processes such as set-up, quality control and packaging. It focuses on continuous improvement to streamline operations and reduce work in process.

"The company has Re-Tooled extensively, integrating high technology machinery throughout its departments to produce and better, faster and more repeatable product. It recently purchased a custom frame face assembly system which will use vision scanning to detect part placement and use tandem robots to glue, pocket drill and screw each joint until the frame is complete. It will be one of the most advanced systems in place in our industry.

"The company is equally committed to Re-Education, employing a "Learning and Talent Development Specialist. It has upwards of 15 training courses such as Leadership, Employee Motivation, Problem Solving and Conflict Management and Time Management. The courses give management hands-on access to workforce development as well the review of each employee's process. In addition, vendors or outside consultants with particular expertise in such subjects as green business practices, marketing and lean manufacturing often are brought in to train employees.

"Custom Cupboard continues to build a foundation that ensures they have capable employees, productive equipment and advanced systems that contribute to the company's continued viability in the marketplace."

Lance Johanson, Custom Cupboard's vice president of operations, accepted the Award.