

Plastics News

PROCESSOR OF THE YEAR 2021

Processor of the Year finalists named

By Don Loepf
Plastics News Editor

Plastics News has named five finalists for the 2021 Processor of the Year award: Comar LLC, MMI Engineered Solutions Inc., Proto Labs Inc., PTI Engineered Plastics Inc. and Teel Plastics LLC.

Three of the companies — Comar, MMI and PTI — are repeat finalists.

All were considered essential businesses and stayed open through the pandemic. In fact, all five companies played important roles in battling COVID-19, making personal protective equipment and important medical products.

All five companies are injection molders but also have significant additional plastics operations. Comar and MMI also do blow molding. Both MMI and PTI have large tooling operations. Teel is well known for its custom extrusion business; injection molding is a newer area of specialization.

Proto Labs, which in official messaging is known as Protolabs, started as an injection molder, but it is now known as a prototyping and digital manufacturing specialist, with mold making and 3D printing operations.

Processor of the Year candidates are judged on seven See **Processor**, Page 15

Plastics News graphic
by Amy Steinhauser

California panel urges crackdown on recyclability labeling

By Steve Toloken
Plastics News Staff

A California government commission tasked with improving recycling is asking the state's attorney general and other agencies, for the first time, to crack down on what it says are illegal environmental labeling claims on plastic bags and film.

The California Statewide Commission on Recycling Markets and Curbside Recycling sent a letter in December to the agency CalRecycle and Attorney General Rob Bonta saying that its review of recycling messages on bags and film turned up dozens of violations of state and federal laws.

Specifically, the commission said that claims about recyclability, including using versions of the popular chasing arrows symbol, confuse consumers and make them think, incorrectly, that the flexible plastic materials can be recycled in regular curbside bins. It wants the state to require those labels to be removed.

But the commission's proposal is drawing pushback from the industry, which points to popular labels like the How2Recycle system as helping to educate the public about when materials can be put in curbside bins and when, as in the case for bags and film, they should be taken to store drop-off locations.

They argue that removing the recycling labeling altogether will send more plastic to landfills and harm in-store bag recycling efforts. And they say that their labels comply with federal and state laws.

The commission sent a letter to CalRecycle and Bonta Dec. 3 giving 80 examples of companies selling flexible plastic packaging in the state with recyclability claims it said violate laws — naming specific retailers, brands and plastics firms.

"Based on existing California law, it is our opinion that See **California**, Page 20

Sweden's Rosti buys Plastic Components Inc.

By Jeannie Reall
Plastics News Correspondent

Plastic Components Inc. is changing hands for the second time in five years.

The Germantown, Wis., injection molder, which has made *Plastics News*' Best Places to Work list for eight consecutive years, now is owned by Rosti Group AB of Malmö, Sweden.

PCI makes engineered parts for the medical, plumbing, pool and aquatics, small engine and automotive markets. PCI CEO and President Derrick Rice said in a Jan. 4 email interview that Rosti shares PCI's vision for scientific molding and innovation, such as



Rosti Group AB of Malmö, Sweden, has purchased Plastic Components Inc., a Germantown, Wis.-based injection molder.
Rosti Group AB photo

PCI's patented lights-out manufacturing design that allows it to run a facility 24/7 without human operators.

Rosti, a contract injection molder founded in 1944, has eight plants in Germany, England, Poland, Romania, Turkey,

China and Malaysia. It serves the packaging, medical, automotive and consumer goods industries.

The company opened a 3D additive printing lab in Boston last year to offer prototypes with a 72-hour turnaround. Rosti has been searching for a U.S. partner for about three years, Rice said.

That lab, as well as the PCI purchase, are part of Rosti's efforts to broaden its U.S. customer base. That plan should work out well for both companies, Rice said. PCI customers' responses have been "overwhelmingly positive," he added.

"We have multinational customers asking us for solutions in See **Rosti**, Page 18



Processor

Continued from Page 1

criteria: financial performance, quality, customer relations, employee relations, environmental performance, industry/public service and technological innovation.

Plastics News editors will visit all the finalists in person. All five finalists will be honored at the 2022 Executive Forum, scheduled for March 21-23 in Naples, Fla.

The winner will be profiled in the April 4 print edition of *PN*. The 2021 *PN* Excellence Award winners will be profiled in the April 11 issue.

The 2020 winner was Plastek Industries Inc., a packaging molding specialist and mold maker based in Erie, Pa.

Here's a description of each finalist, in alphabetical order:

A year of growth for Comar

Comar was founded in 1949, originally as a glass manufacturer. From the beginning, it had a stake in the health care sector, which is its largest market today. The company was founded by current CEO Michael Ruggieri's grandfather.

Comar sold the glass business in 2006 to focus on plastics.

In its submission, Comar said significant investments in people and manufacturing assets have the business "poised for an exceptional future."

On the COVID front, Comar is a leading supplier of custom rigid packaging for wet wipes, a product that was in heavy demand in 2020 and 2021. It makes medical products that have been in high demand as well.

The company has 11 manufacturing facilities and more than 1,100 employees, all in North America. The most recent expansion came via acquisition: On Dec. 28, Comar announced that it has purchased Omega Packaging, a La Mirada, Calif.-based injection and blow molder that serves the pharmaceutical, nutraceutical, sports nutrition and skin care markets.

Prior to that deal, the company has been expanding organically. In 2021, it was busy building new plants in Rancho Cucamonga, Calif., and Vineland, N.J., plus it moved into a larger facility in West Bend, Wis.

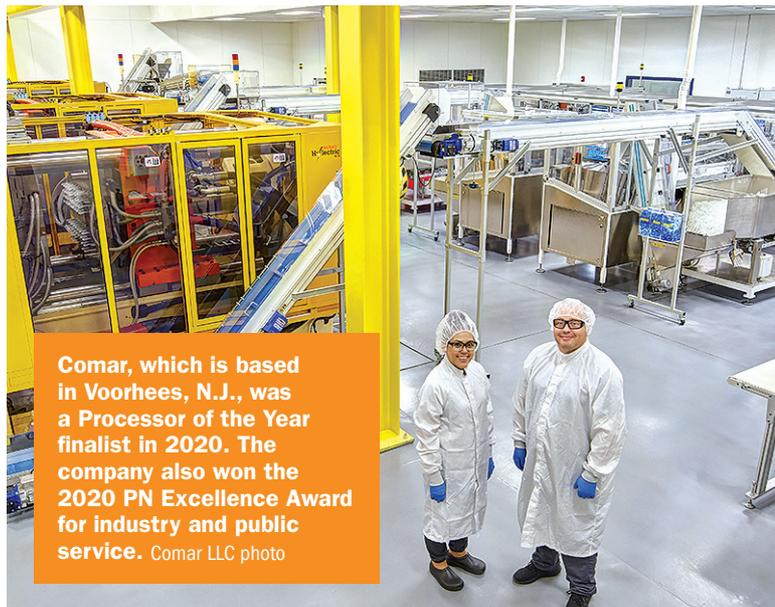
Comar, which is based in Voorhees, N.J., was a Processor of the Year finalist in 2020. The company also won the 2020 *PN* Excellence Award for industry and public service.

MMI invests in training

Saline, Mich.-based MMI Engineered Solutions was a finalist for the Processor of the Year trophy in 2019 and 2020 and is back for a third time in 2021.

In its 2021 submission, the company highlighted creative ways it is dealing with labor shortages and changing regulations, including government rules related to COVID-19. MMI has dealt with the changing market by investing in new equipment, training and quality resources.

"The challenges of 2021 con-



Comar, which is based in Voorhees, N.J., was a Processor of the Year finalist in 2020. The company also won the 2020 *PN* Excellence Award for industry and public service. Comar LLC photo



MMI Engineered Solutions was a finalist for the Processor of the Year trophy in 2019 and 2020 and is back for a third time in 2021. MMI Engineered Solutions Inc. photo

The 2021 Processor of the Year will be the 27th company to earn the trophy. *Plastics News* has named a winner each year since 1996, and there was a tie for the top honor in 2002.

The winning Processor of the Year will be announced at the *Plastics News* Executive Forum, scheduled for March 21-23 in Naples, Fla.

The winners of the three *PN* Excellence awards will also be named at the event. Those awards honor processors that excel in one of three Processor of the Year criteria: customer relations, employee relations and industry/public service.

Award finalists can be a company or an operating division — public or private — that has been engaged in plastics processing in North America for at least five years.

Previous Processor of the Year winners are not eligible to win again, but they are eligible instead for the *PN* Sustained Excellence award.



Callahan

company and remained focused on our customers, our employees and our future."

To address a skills shortage in the labor market, MMI contracted with Guinness Technologies — a training firm headed by two professors from Ferris State University's Plastics Engineering Technol-

ogy program — to provide more than 30 new employees with injection molding basic training.

The company does injection molding and blow molding of automotive parts in plants in Saline and Warren, Mich., and in Monterey, Mexico. MMI also designs and makes molds in-house.

Owner, President and CEO Doug Callahan considers MMI's in-house toolmaking to be a competitive advantage, since it allows the company to rapidly respond to customer needs.

A digital manufacturing pioneer

Protolabs, based in Maple Plain, Minn., is a first-time Processor of the Year finalist and still a rela-



Protolabs, based in Maple Plain, Minn., is a first-time Processor of the Year finalist. Protolabs photo



PTI Engineered Plastics was a finalist for the 2019 Processor of the Year award, and it is back as a finalist for the 2021 award. PTI Engineered Plastics Inc. photo



Bodor

tively young company.

The firm was founded as Protomold Co. Inc. in 1999 and was an early adopter of digital manufacturing technology. Founder Larry Lukis believed that the time

needed to manufacture injection molded parts could be radically reduced with the integration of complex software to automate the process.

Protolabs is the only publicly traded Processor of the Year finalist this year. It held an initial public offering in 2012.

Today, Protolabs offers 16 manufacturing processes, which fall under four main service offerings: 3D printing, injection molding, sheet metal fabrication and computer numerically controlled machining. Protolabs makes more than 5 million parts per month and operates a dozen facilities across five countries.

Protolabs' speed-to-market capabilities were vital during the pandemic, as it was able to quickly prototype and help commercialize COVID-related products.

"Protolabs also had an advantage during the pandemic by building up a robust and diverse supply chain over the last 20 years," the company wrote in its submission. "We are able to source our raw materials, resins and metals while not being limited to a single point of supply chain failure. With that, our in-

ventory levels did not cause any disruption at the height of the pandemic."

In 2021, the company promoted Rob Bodor to the CEO role, replacing longtime CEO Vicki Holt, who retired. Bodor joined Protolabs in 2012 and was most recently vice president and general manager for the Americas.

PTI focuses on design, tooling and molding

Macomb, Mich.-based PTI Engineered Plastics was a finalist for the 2019 Processor of the Year award, and it is back as a finalist for the 2021 award.

When Mark Rathbone founded the company in 1984, PTI Engineered Plastics operated under the name of Proto-Tech Industries and focused on functional prototype molds and injection molded samples.

The current name came in 1987, to reflect how the company had become a turnkey manufacturing operation. A major change came in 2010 when PTI expanded its design capabilities with the launch of an in-house design studio that specializes in product innovation and development.

Today, PTI is a custom injection molder serving a diverse customer base, including medical, automotive, defense/aerospace and commercial/consumer products companies. The company specializes in low-volume complex parts.

The company is well known in the Macomb County area, north of Detroit, for being active in the community. As an example, PTI



Teel Plastics has not been a Processor of the Year finalist, but the company did win the PN Excellence Award for industry and public service in 2019.

Teel Plastics LLC photo



Rathbone

is a regular participant in Manufacturing Day, a nationwide initiative designed to increase awareness about the vital role manufacturing plays in the economy. Each year, the company hosts high school students, giving them an overview in design, tooling, manufacturing and secondary services.

Rathbone, who is the company's CEO, said PTI's growth has brought both challenges and rewards.

"I can proudly say that I still have many employees that have been with me for 30 or more years. I'm also honored to say that about some of my customers," he wrote in the company's submission. "In any business, a relationship with your employees and customers is the key to success; without those, you just have an empty building."

Swab sticks put a spotlight on Teel

In 2021, Teel Plastics President and Chief Commercial Officer Tom Thompson was tasked with tremendous responsibility: to rapidly expand capacity to make swab stick handles for COVID-19 diagnostic test kits.

"Teel's longtime customer, Puritan Medical Products of Guilford, Maine, was asked in March 2020 by Vice President Mike Pence's office to increase test kit production. In response, Teel adjusted

its schedules and priorities to increase production of the swab stick handles for the flocked swabs used in Puritan's test kits," Teel said in its submission.

"Teel shortly began running them 24/7 and has produced approximately over 1.5 billion swab sticks in the last 19-20 months."

Teel substantially expanded swab capacity thanks to a U.S. Department of Defense contract awarded in October 2020, which the company used to buy nine new Arburg injection molding machines and two extruders focused on swab production. Teel added 50 additional employees.

With a tip of the hat to Willy Wonka, Teel started a "Golden Ticket" program in 2021 that awards employees who refer a new hire to the company with a ticket that's redeemable for cash or an extra full week of vacation.

Teel was established as Insemit Co., a specialty manufacturer and distributor of agricultural implements and tools for the veterinary and the emerging livestock artificial insemination industry, in 1951.

In 2020, Teel was acquired by MPE Partners, a private equity firm, and became an LLC.

While Baraboo, Wis.-based Teel Plastics has not been a Processor of the Year finalist, the company did win the

PN Excellence Award for industry and public service in 2019.



Thompson

Previous winners

- | | |
|---|--|
| 2020 — Plastek Industries Inc. | 2006 — Mack Molding Co. |
| 2019 — Intertech Plastics Inc. | 2005 — U.S. Farathane Corp. |
| 2018 — MTD Micro Molding | 2004 — Miniature Precision Components Inc. |
| 2017 — Petoskey Plastics Inc. | 2003 — Unimark Plastics. |
| 2016 — Dymotek Corp. | 2002 — (tie) Tech Group Inc. and Precise Technology Inc. |
| 2015 — Evco Plastics | 2001 — Cascade Engineering Inc. |
| 2014 — Stihl Inc. | 2000 — Tessa Plastics Corp. |
| 2013 — Tech Molded Plastics Inc. | 1999 — Royal Group Technologies Ltd. |
| 2012 — Hoffer Plastics Corp. | 1998 — Courtesy Corp. |
| 2011 — Steinwall Inc. | 1997 — Nypro Inc. |
| 2010 — Plastikos Inc. | 1996 — Bryan Custom Plastics |
| 2009 — GW Plastics Inc. | |
| 2008 — Plastic Components Inc. | |
| 2007 — Innovative Injection Technologies Inc. | |

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FRANK ESPOSITO



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Some resin prices fell in late 2021, while others saw surprising increases. Which direction will they head in 2022? Get the latest information from *Plastics News* senior reporter Frank Esposito.

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