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PALLET ENTERPRISE



CJ Sheeran Emphasizes Investment in Equipment, Employees and Community

By Rick LeBlanc

A lot has changed since Mark Sheeran returned from London during the recession of the early 1990s to work in the family business. Mark Sheeran then joined Canice, his father, and the five employees who did everything at what was a very small fam-

ily pallet operation. Now in business for over 25 years, CJ Sheeran is Ireland's largest new and recycled pallet producer, experiencing significant growth over the past seven years.

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company in Ireland and the United Kingdom. This is an enviable position to hold given the ongoing uncertainty about how ISPM-15 requirements will change in the future with Brexit. The company is headquartered in Mountrath, a town in the southern part of the Mid-



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lands Region of the country. The location is exactly halfway between Limerick and Dublin.

Focused on Growth and Diversification

Taking over as managing director of newly formed CJ Sheeran (CJS) after studying at the University of Limerick and having worked in both the United States and London, Mark saw the need to diversify. Only a few years earlier, his father's small business had been slammed by the loss of its predominant customer. A leading brewer, which had accounted for 90% of the small firm's sales, the company decided to consolidate its pallet supply with another vendor.

Still smarting from the loss, the importance of building a broader customer base was not lost upon Mark. He focused on creating relationships with the many manufacturing companies that were entering Ireland at that time to use the country as an entry point into the European Union market. The young company also diversified into pallet recycling and formed The Garden Gate, a company that produced fencing, gates and other related home and garden products.

The company marked an important turning point in 2012 when it acquired Wood Systems in Ballinrobe to complement its original site in Mountrath. It was the first of several acquisitions. In 2015, CJS also purchased a second site in Mountrath, as well as another three pallet businesses since that time. Through a combination of organic growth and acquisitions, the company has seen five-fold sales growth over a seven-year period.

Today, the company's network features a total of six locations, including those two new manufacturing plants, its major pallet recycling center in Mountrath, as well as strategically located warehousing and distribution locations. CJS recycles over 2.5 million pallets annually. The CJ Sheeran Group currently includes its wood pallet and packaging business as well as The Garden Gate and Comfybed Equine Bedding, a company supplying fiber-based product for the equestrian industry.

A testament to the company's level of professionalism, CJS has achieved an

impressive list of certificates and standards to meet customer quality and sustainability requirements. It recently received Wood Fuel Quality Assurance (WFQA) certification. This accreditation provides a simple but reliable way for consumers to purchase quality wood fuels. It also holds all three ISOs – ISO 9001, ISO 14001 and ISO45001 as well as FSC Certification and Sedex SMETA 4 Pillar Conformity (ethical trade audit). Others include ISPM-15 and EPAL certification. And most recently, CJS has achieved Business All-Stars Best in Class Accreditation.

New Automated Corali Line Boosts Total Production Capacity to 5 Million Per Year

CJS took delivery of a new fully automated Corali nailing line in 2019, a move that boosts its overall nailing capacity to 2.5 million pallets annually over a single shift. The new system boasts leading edge technology and precision manufacturing capabilities, enabling the production of eight pallets per minute and rapid changeovers. Sensors detect any protruding nails from pallets they can be ejected before stacking.

“We chose a Corali because we felt it was the best choice for us at the time,” stated Mark. “We already have a Corali line in our Ballinrobe plant, and we felt that it had run effectively since 2005 with very few issues.” The installation of the new system was relatively smooth, with the deck machine installed first. Once it was up and running efficiently, the main line was then added.

The machine was specifically modified for quick changeover including going from block to stringer pallets. “This has greatly enhanced our performance, speed and variety of pallets produced,” he said.

“The versatility of the machine allows us to auto-produce a broad range of pallet sizes and styles to cater for our cus-

tomers’ many requirements,” added Peter Rice, operations manager and lead buyer at CJS. “Changeovers are now very fast so machine downtime is reduced. This also enables us to fulfill any last-minute orders that customers may have.”

According to Giovanni Perini of Corali, based in Bergamo, Italy, there are three crucial benefits associated with the Corali line. The first one pertains to the flexibility of the Corali technology to permit extremely rapid changeovers, thanks to computerized controls that automatically change various parts of the line to produce various sizes without manual changes.

The second differentiator has to do with the accuracy of the settings. You don’t need to worry about whether or not the operator has a headache when it comes to the accuracy of the pallet measurements, Perini said. “Month by month and year by year,” he noted, the precise measurements of the pallet will stay exactly the same, which is extremely important from a quality perspective.

The third point he emphasized is the limited learning curve for new operators. The simplicity of the system allows the operator to simply download the product information. For markets such as the United States where employee turnover is high, he observed, Corali can help newer employees achieve peak productivity more quickly.

As well as the two Corali systems, CJS also runs a Storti line with a CMS block feeder. “The CMS equipment has proven to be very good and has exceeded expectations,” Mark said. The company also runs some Gunn Vanderloo machines for specialty or custom pallets.

The company has some milling capabilities but relies predominantly upon FSC certified cut stock for new pallet production.

Biomass Heated Kilns from Termolegno Power Industry Leading HT Capacity

CJS has invested in a 2.5MW boiler for each of its Ballinrobe and Mountrath plants to power its kilns. “It was a no brainer to use biomass as opposed to any other option,” Mark explained. “The fact that we can supply our own biomass fuel helps us to keep kiln operational costs down. Also, from a sustainability perspective, it makes perfect sense.”

“We had looked at a number of kiln providers but settled with Termolegno, a family run kiln manufacturer in Italy,” he added. “We found them to be very efficient and knowledgeable with excellent customer service.”

The controlled variable speed ventilation system of the Termolegno kilns can reduce energy consumption by 25% to 40%, explained Ilaria Fornasier, area manager export for Termolegno.

Moreover, she noted, thanks to a properly dimensioned heat recovery system, savings of up to 20% are possible compared to traditional drying kiln systems.

Research in the field of wood drying is constantly resulting in the development of new systems and drying kilns for Termolegno. “The demands of the customers and their advantages are the driving force behind innovations,” she said. “This improves energy efficiency and helps achieve a more uniform temperature inside the kiln.”

“We are truly honored to work with Sheeran,” Fornasier stated, adding that the first Termolegno kiln was delivered to Ballinrobe in 2005. “We can say we grew up together. Last year both CJ Sheeran and Termolegno celebrated their first 25 years of activity. Mark Sheeran is a brilliant business developer who worked hard to achieve excellent results. Working with Ashleigh, Mark and Fergal and the whole team at Sheeran is very pleasant, and we hope to maintain this beautiful working relationship.”

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TalentTree: Proprietary Employee Development Initiative Aimed at Filling Talent Gaps and Shift to Automation

CJS has always actively supported employee development, and has now formalized this process through the launch of TalentTree. “We felt that we were competing for staff with the construction industry, and we wanted to do something a little different to improve both retention and recruitment of our production operatives,” explained Ashleigh Doyle, director.

“We also felt that there was a shift in the industry towards automation and robotics and that we would need to upskill our team further to equip them for more technical roles within the business,” she added. As a company operating in rural communities, locality was also a key factor. “All of our employees live in close proximity to our facilities and have been with us for a long time. We wanted to give them the opportunity to develop

their career here and to get them on a path to progression at CJS as we continue to grow and expand, as well as maintaining that essential work life balance without having to commute for work.”

To bring it to fruition, CJS is appraising each member of staff in their individual roles and in their role as a team member, identifying and addressing any skills gaps and then providing development opportunities in areas such as trades, lean transformation, and ISO.

“We are building a world class business for our local communities and securing decent employment for our future generations. This is also having a positive impact on the mindset of our employees. After all, excellence is not a skill – it’s an attitude,” Doyle concluded.

CJS continues to be recognized by the wood pallet and container industry and by the business community at large. Fergal Moran, business development di-

rector, was recently elected to the TIMCON board of directors, the UK and Ireland body representing timber packaging and pallet businesses, while late last year, Mark Sheeran received a University of Limerick alumni award for Outstanding Achievement in Business. Only 47 people from a global alumni community of 100,000 have so far received this prestigious honor.

If there has been one constant in the path of CJ Sheeran from a 5-person crew to its industry leading position today, it has been Mark’s fierce loyalty to staff and community.

“The business has grown on the back of the highly talented and committed team members,” he said. “The industry has changed dramatically over the years and having the right people has been instrumental to our growth.”

For more information on Corali, visit www.corali-usa.com or www.corali.it. To find out more about Termolegno kilns, visit www.termolegno.com. 