

# Board Converting News

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## Acme Corrugated Box Earns Greater Philly Chamber Award

**H**atboro, Pennsylvania based Acme Corrugated Box was among eight companies and two individuals selected by the The Greater Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce (GPCC) as winners of its 2016 Excellence Awards. Lauded for their exceptional leadership, ingenuity and positive impact on the region, the winners represent small businesses in one of 10 industries or categories and will receive their awards on November 5.

**Bob Cohen**

“Each of this year’s recipients models how organizations can make a difference, contribute to the region’s economy and be outstanding leaders in their respective fields,” said GPCC President and CEO Rob Wonderling. “The Chamber is proud to honor their hard work, innovation and creativity through the Excellence Awards.”

“Acme Corrugated is a leader in the industry and the community. They have revolutionized the corrugated cardboard market, and are extremely committed to workforce development in manufacturing in their company and throughout the region,” said Bud Tyler, Vice President of The E F Precision Group and Chair of the Greater Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce Small Business Board. “The Excellence Award winners are meant to set a standard within the small business community, and Acme Corrugated has done that exceedingly well.”

“I was surprised that we were selected primarily because of the type of industrial product we manufacture,” said Acme Box’s President Bob Cohen.

“Corrugated is not sexy or often thought of in a ‘high tech’ vein. There are a number of incubator type manufacturing start-ups that were considered.

“I actually thought that the Chamber would favor a more tech-oriented type of manufacturer, but I’m delighted to win,” Cohen added, noting that his company had also captured the award back in 1998. “The election process took about five months and included interviews with about 30 people involved. Personally, I was asked a number of questions about our history, our industry, our place in the market and how we are able to remain competitive.

“I think we were interesting to the Chamber because of our intensive capital improvement plan, our comprehensive training program for employees and our significant investment in capital equipment and technology,” he said. “The combination of rising expectations of our client base, the new paper options that we were to bring to market, the flexibility we were able to offer in response to tighter manufacturing timelines and the buy-in by our associates on how we operate has allowed us to grow our market share at a pace far greater than the general box demand growth in the last five years.

“Our management is focused and progressive,” he said. “We have always had a corporate culture that embraces change. It was not lost on the Chamber that we have continued to grow and thrive in a highly competitive region, in a highly competitive product that has seen the number of box plants decrease, over the last 30 years, by 75 percent.”

### **The Talent Pool**

Not unlike manufacturers in other industrial sectors, Acme Corrugated Box has had, and will continue to

have, problems securing a skilled workforce, Cohen said. "The plant of tomorrow will need a pool of highly skilled employees to man their plants in order to serve their client base. Without a source of bench strength for hiring we will continue to find people who come to the manufacturing sector by default."

Over the years, Cohen has embraced opportunities that have arisen from regional contacts in industry. One was with West Catholic High School in Philadelphia.

"I was made aware by people at Delaware Valley Industrial Research Center in Philadelphia of a program West Catholic had initiated," he explained. "The new principal at the school understood that in serving a minority community his main objective was to find a way to give meaning to his students' education.

"One way to prepare students for life after high school was to develop an engineering program that would prepare the students for further educational

possibilities (college) or offer a road to success in the private sector," Cohen said.

"The program started last year: a select group of students at West Catholic are studying mathematics, physics, mechanical drawing, and developing computer skills, etc.," he explained. "We hope by their senior year that these students will be prepared for a job in the new environment of manufacturing and will become a source of future employees.

"It's been apparent to me for a while that hiring off the street will not 'cut it' in the future. This outreach does two things - it offers good middle-class employment to people who might otherwise miss the opportunity and it allows us to raise our skill level through a pointed educational process," said Cohen.

The 2016 Greater Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce Excellence Awards are sponsored by PIDC, Stradley Ronon, Saint Joseph University's Initiative for Family Business and Entrepreneurship, and TD Bank.