Ingenuity powers Reynolds Packaging’s growth

CEO Lisa Reynolds has led Reynolds Packaging of Ashwaubenon to dramatic growth thanks to new products and improved technology.
A new view of packaging

We don’t normally discuss fashion in Insight, but this is an exception. As you look at our cover story this month, you may be curious about the dress Reynolds Packaging CEO Lisa Reynolds is wearing. Here’s a hint: It’s something her company works with every day — plastic used to make food pouches. The dress was dreamed up by stylist Shalene Enz and her friend, Rhonda Johnson. The duo worked for hours to bring the idea to life.

The flexibility and strength of plastic play an integral role in the food pouches made every day at Reynolds Packaging. The company grew dramatically in the past year, going from four to 15 employees while at the same time launching new products, including ones made from biodegradable plastic. That kind of growth is impressive, and doing it during a pandemic is amazing.

Started in 1999 in the Reynoldses’ garage, the company is now in its third location and in need of more space as it continues to grow. To read more about Reynolds Packaging and the ingenuity that keeps it running, turn to my cover story on page 20.

With this month’s Insight, you also received Champions of Innovation, a publication where businesses could share their own stories of innovation. The New North is home to multiple spaces to help entrepreneurs get their start as they develop innovations of their own. Turn to page 27 to read Nikki Kallio’s Insight Insider on how these resources help bring ideas to life.

We recently completed judging for our 2021 Insight Women of Influence in the New North Region Awards. With so many compelling nominations, it was difficult to choose this year’s winners. Our judges made a lot of hard decisions and here’s a look at this year’s winners:

- **Lifetime Achievement Award:** Dr. Susan May, Fox Valley Technical College
- **Corporate Leader:** Heather Schimmers, Ascension Wisconsin
- **Business Owner:** Natasha Torry, Legal Action of Wisconsin, Rooted Law, LLC
- **Mentor:** Andrea Holdorf, Oshkosh Area School District
- **Difference Maker — Community:** Dr. Bola Delano-Oriaran, St. Norbert College
- **Difference Maker — Nonprofit:** Rosangela Berbert, Samaritan Counseling Center
- **Young Influencer:** Claire Paprocki, Brown County Health & Human Services

### Women of Influence

- **Women of Influence in the New North Region Awards luncheon**
  - The luncheon will be held starting at 11 a.m. on Aug. 3 at the Radisson Green Bay Hotel and Conference Center. Visit insightonbusiness.com/women for more information.

Reynolds’ video is one of many you will find online at insightonbusiness.com/home/cover-story-videos.
CEO Lisa Reynolds has led Reynolds Packaging of Ashwaubenon to dramatic growth thanks to new products and improved technology. Her dress is made from plastic used by Reynolds Packaging to make its flexible packaging products.
CEO Lisa Reynolds has led Reynolds Packaging of Ashwaubenon to dramatic growth thanks to new products and improved technology. Her dress is made from plastic used by Reynolds Packaging to make its flexible packaging products.
gaps and continued once regular customers returned and new ones signed on.

“A year ago, we had four employees; now we have 15,” Lisa Reynolds says. “After seeing business decline so suddenly at the end of the first quarter and at the beginning of the second (in 2020), we have seen dramatic growth.”

That growth has the company planning to add two more production lines as well as a physical expansion, says President and COO Kelly Reynolds.

“We saw so much growth in the past year and we know more growth is ahead,” he says.

**FROM THE GROUND UP**

The Reynoldses never intended to own a packaging company. Kelly Reynolds built or rebuilt packaging machines while Lisa Reynolds worked on developing and building projects in downtown Green Bay.

That changed in 1999 when Valley Packaging sold its machines. Kelly Reynolds purchased two that he had worked on and set them up in his garage, hiring his mom and aunt to help run them. “I knew a lot of the customers — namely confectionaries like Seroogy’s Chocolates and Beerntsen’s Confectionary — who used the packaging from those machines,” he says. “I was able to win that business.”

From that small start, business quickly grew. It finally got to a stage where trucks delivering supplies blocked traffic on their street and the garage was filled with materials, leaving “barely any room to move around,” Lisa Reynolds says.

The company moved to a 2,000-square-foot building in 2004 and then in 2019 purchased and renovated

“Kelly is a tinkerer and can build or rebuild machines. He’s our secret sauce.”

—Lisa Reynolds, CEO, Reynolds Packaging

Reynolds Packaging started in the Reynoldses’ garage in 1999. Since then, the company has continued to grow. In 2020, the business went from four to 15 employees.

PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY REYNOLDS PACKAGING

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Small Business Administration Jovita Carranza (second from right) visited Reynolds Packaging last August to shine a light on its successes. Kelly and Lisa Reynolds stand in the center.

A building in Ashwaubenon to handle its additional growth. Now two years later, Reynolds Packaging needs to expand again. “We have four shipping containers outside that are full besides our shop,” Lisa Reynolds says.

Speed is a factor that differentiates Reynolds Packaging, Kelly Reynolds says. “Our niche is speed to market. We have one machine that replaces what five machines could do. It’s more efficient,” he says. “We can do a two-week turnaround.”

After Kelly Reynolds built the larger packaging machine, Lisa Reynolds traveled to Chicago and called on six potential customers to discuss how the company could make more packaging in less time. She won over every customer. “Others can’t compete with us on speed,” Kelly Reynolds says.

Or with his ingenuity. For example, earlier this year, a newly added production line needed a chiller to cool material during the manufacturing process. Kelly Reynolds obtained two recycled beer coolers previously used at Lambeau Field and converted them to meet the machine’s needs.

That kind of thinking — replicated throughout the company’s manufacturing area — allows Reynolds Packaging to meet customers’ diverse needs.

Compostable packaging is Reynolds Packaging’s largest growth category and one that customers are seeking, Lisa Reynolds says. The company developed a bag that’s not only 100 percent compostable but offers a compostable closing mechanism as well.

“Sustainable packaging is one of the industry’s biggest trends and it’s one we’re ahead on,” she says.

Chief Operating Officer Kelly Reynolds has either built or rebuilt the company’s packaging machines, allowing him to configure each one specially for the business’s products.

Reynolds Packaging developed a technology combining complex blends of compostable polymers converted into flexible, fully compostable packaging. Kelly Reynolds says the technology also keeps products fresh for an extended shelf life.

“We developed a technology that gives the flexible packaging industry an opportunity to use sustainable, compostable films and higher-performance thinner films while keeping the pouch integrity and brand equity intact,” Kelly Reynolds says.

Lisa Reynolds says the certified biodegradable and compostable flexible films used in the packaging allow companies to “showcase and talk about the sustainability journey of their own packaging” when discussing their products. As consumers become more interested in a product’s sustainability features, having a fully compostable package can make a big difference in what someone may choose to purchase.

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Stewart says the Reynoldses make a great team. “They both have their strengths. Lisa is detail driven, while Kelly is a bit of a mad scientist, always trying new things. He’s one of the most innovative people around. They can’t do everything and I helped them fill in the pieces in areas where they needed help.”

SWITCHING FOCUS

Work was humming along at Reynolds Packaging until the pandemic hit. In the spring of 2020, the company had many of its regular customers cancel or delay orders due to a decline in demand or because their business was closed due to stay-at-home orders. Fortunately, a new opportunity came the company’s way. “We were contacted by a local innovation group about making PPE and then also the state put out a message to manufacturers to encourage them to make PPE,” Lisa Reynolds says. “We felt like it was a good way to give back to our community.”

Reynolds Packaging quickly developed a plan to make masks and filters as well as packaging for alcohol and hand sanitizer wipes. The company worked with another business on the filtration material. The PPE work came at just the right time and provided much-needed supplies locally. The PPE went to local hospitals and the Green Bay Area Public School District. “People were lined up waiting to get our products,” Lisa Reynolds says. “It felt great to make a product that was so beneficial.”

“Everything had to happen very quickly,” she says. Last summer, when the manufacturer had a large order of packaging for wipes, the company created three shifts so the machines could run 24 hours a day to complete the order on time. “Our employees are great and always ready to do what needs to be done,” Kelly Reynolds says.

The company’s ability to switch focus quickly garnered a lot of attention. Last summer, Small Business Administration Administrator Jovita Carranza visited as part of a tour recognizing...
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— Dean Stewart, executive director, Center for Exceptional Leadership in the Schneider School of Business & Economics at St. Norbert College

businesses that successfully used a Paycheck Protection Program loan to keep their workers employed as well as to shine a spotlight on Reynolds’ PPE line. Lisa Reynolds called the visit an honor.

“We were in the middle of a big order and things were a bit busy, but it was wonderful to have her here and be in the spotlight,” she says, adding the couple turned to the SBA as well as the Small Business Development Center for help with purchasing its new building and equipment.

Another honor was soon to come: In December, the company won the Wisconsin Marketplace Award in the woman-owned small business category for demonstrating excellence in sales growth, product innovation, employment and management.

“It was amazing to receive that award. We worked so hard and it was nice to be recognized,” Lisa Reynolds says.

While winning awards is gratifying, Kelly Reynolds says seeing the packaging the company makes is something special. “It’s great to walk in the grocery store and see our products right there on the shelf,” he says. “It’s an amazing feeling.”

During 2020, Reynolds Packaging increased its product offerings to include personal protective equipment and packaging for hand sanitizer. The ability to pivot so quickly attracted the attention of SBA Administrator Jovita Carranza, above. At the height of its PPE efforts and other work in 2020, the company’s machines were running 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

ONLINE: Listen to Reynolds Packaging CEO Lisa Reynolds discuss the increased interest in compostable packaging, which has led to company growth.