

## Q&A With Nick Wilson, PACE Award Recipient



Nick Wilson is the president and CEO of Morrison Container Handling Solutions, which provides packaging solutions for national and international companies. He is also the 2011 recipient of the Professional Achievement Citation in Engineering (PACE) award from Iowa State University, Department of Chemical and Biological Engineering. Wilson earned a B.S. in chemical engineering from Iowa State University in 1967.

PACE was established in 1968 to recognize superior technical or professional accomplishments in research, development, administration, education, and other engineering activities. The citation recognizes alumnae known for their professional competence and creativity.

**Q: Morrison Container Handling Solutions began in 1971 because you saw a need in the industry for technical expertise in container-handling product manufacturing. How has the area of container-handling product manufacturing changed since then?**

A: In a number of ways:

- Production speeds have increased tremendously. In 1971, 100-120 bpm was typical, now most lines run at 300-450 bpm, and beverage lines are running 800-2000 bpm.
- The need for quicker changeovers on lines and having the changeovers performed by operators or less skilled workers has become important. The move to quicker changeover is driven by the need to increase equipment utilization.

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- Containers have changed a lot, particularly in the last few years. The weight reduction of the containers themselves presents a handling challenge, as well as the significant changes in presentation that has been driven by the needs of the big box stores.

**Q: Material handling, along with manufacturing as a whole, has taken a hit during the recession. How would you describe the state of material handling now? How has Morrison Container Handling Solutions weathered the recession?**

A: Robust, at least in the container handling and packaging area. The recent PACK EXPO-LAS VEGAS had record attendance, record floor space, and a record number of exhibitors. We are seeing that robustness reflected in our business, both in current sales and interest in future projects.

Our business has been excellent all through this business cycle. We help companies improve line efficiencies, reduce changeover time, and impact product presentation—which coincides with their desire to reduce manpower, increase operating efficiencies, and sharpen their presentation at the retail level.

**Q: Can you elaborate on your commitment to packaging education and your work with the Mechatronics Program?**

A: We all know the world has become more dependent on technology. Several years ago, I was discussing the need for individual workers who understand both the mechanical and electrical requirements of our equipment. This developed into conversations with the Purdue University-Calumet regional campus in Hammond, IN that supports our area. I was able to help them understand the size and needs of the packaging industry, and the opportunity it presents for students. I am really proud of the mechatronics program which launched in Fall 2008. It was the first 4 year Packaging Mechatronics degree program in the nation. I've continued to help develop the program by facilitating equipment donations and advisory board support. It has been a real win for the university, the students, and us—we have been able to bring qualified people from the program onto the Morrison team.

**Q: As an Iowa State University alumnus and leader in the container handling industry, what did it mean to you to be awarded the 2011 PACE award from Iowa State University?**

I believe strongly in education so it truly was an honor to receive this award from such a prestigious engineering university like Iowa State—to be selected to be a member of such a selected group of people is a real privilege.

**Q: We're seeing technology advancements and innovation throughout manufacturing. What about container handling? Are there any new technologies that manufacturers should keep an eye on?**

Morrison is currently working on a number of projects which involve grouping, collating, and improved retail presentation that impacts the marketability of

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products. Many of these projects include a reduction in packaging material, which results in a more sustainable outcome. Based on initial feedback and customer interest, Morrison expects there will be a lot of activity in the collation, orientation, and presentation of products over the next few years.

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