

The Preferred Partner for Material Handling Solutions

How Conveyer & Caster – Equipment for Industry has thrived for 60 years

BY STEVE GUGLIELMO

The Stohr family has material handling running through its blood. Current owners **Jeff Stohr**, CEO, and **Trevor Stohr**, President, are the third-generation of the family to own Conveyer & Caster – Equipment For Industry (CC-EFI). The Stohrs can trace their roots all the way back to Amish Country in Pennsylvania. **Albert T. Stohr, Sr.** worked for a caster manufacturer led by his brother-in-law. That job took him to Cleveland, Ohio, to work as a salesman. Eventually, Albert Sr. left the caster manufacturer to work for a forklift distributorship. After spending ten years familiarizing himself with various material handling equipment, Stohr decided to strike out on his own and founded Conveyer & Caster in 1961.

When Albert Sr. started the business, his son, **Albert T. Stohr, Jr.** was a sophomore in college.

"After his sophomore year, my father was approached by my grandfather who said, 'Why don't you come home and work with me for a year and then go back to college?'" says Jeff Stohr.

Unfortunately, not long after Albert Jr. made the decision to join his father, tragedy struck the young company.

"In year two of the business, my grandfather got terminal lung cancer and passed away," Jeff says. "So, my dad took over the company in 1963, almost from its inception."

That could have been the end of the story for Conveyer & Caster. Instead, the company persevered, flourished,

and is now preparing to celebrate its 60th Anniversary next year.

Culture

The company is built on the vision of being the preferred partner for material handling solutions. The company sells material handling products and



solutions into almost every industry segment. into almost every segment of the material handling industry.

"Back in the day, our tagline was, 'Everything on wheels but automobiles,'" Jeff says. "We've never ventured into the forklift side."

At the start, the company sold mainly casters, wheels and Matthews Conveyor.

"Over the years, we've added more material handling lines," Jeff notes.

Part of the reason CC-EFI was able to endure the sudden loss of its founder and continue to grow and thrive for the next 55+ years is due to the bedrock principles upon which the company is built. Conveyer & Caster believes that honesty, respect and clear

communication are critical to maintaining strong relationships.

"We very much have a 'We Care' culture," Jeff says. "Our Mission, Vision, Values statement includes, 'Simply do it right, because we care.' The idea of 'Simply do it right' is to treat the business like it's your own. Make good decisions. If we screw up, we fix it and we fix it fast. If it costs money, spend it. Don't ask me, just get it fixed. We try to really put ourselves in other's shoes and walk their walk."

The company also strongly believes in grooming its employees and giving them a career path that they can grow and advance in.

"We believe in helping our people grow with us as the company grows," Jeff says. "We give our people a path to grow. We've created a level of management called LEAD. In each department, we have a lead, which means that when the manager is out or working on something else, there's a person that can



lead the department. It gives us a path to promote people and elevate them."

The philosophies of the business can be traced back to the founding. To honor Albert Sr. and Jr., the company's training facility still bears their name.

"We have two levels of offices," Trevor explains. "In our lower level, we have a training room called the Albert T. Stohr University, Center for Personal and Professional Development. It's our chance to dedicate our future growth to them."

Family Business

Another part of the company's culture is that everything is earned, not given. Albert Jr. sold the business to Jeff and Trevor in 2004. But not before both Stohrs cut their teeth outside of the business.

"We both worked for public companies," Jeff said. "There are numerous benefits to working outside of the business first. You come in with experience, so that other employees don't look at us as being handed the keys





to the kingdom. We came in with real world experience. We were able to use what we learned in college to develop a work ethic and learn about the real world, not on the company dime. We learned to understand what we didn't know."

Today, that best practice is actually codified.

"We have made it a family rule that you need to work outside of the business before you come in," Jeff says. "My dad was adamant that we spend at least four years or more outside of the business. And that's the rule that we have with our kids now."

The notion of a "Family Business" extends outside of the Stohr bloodline, however. At CC-EFI, everyone is family.

"I know it's a cliché, but we all treat our colleagues like our work family," says Trevor. "We really value the

respect that entails. We cover for each other. We really try to solve problems internally and make this a place where people can grow and thrive."

In 2019, CC-EFI moved into a brand new facility. That new facility is truly state of the art and the company has spared no expense in making it an atmosphere where people can get their work done but also have fun.

"We've got a complete entertainment center with a bar and shuffle board, ping pong, Foosball, a poker room, a 14-foot projection screen, a training room and a full gym," Jeff says. "We bring a trainer in twice per week to offer free classes in our gym to anybody who is interested. We have Friday Happy Hours every other week. We even put in a Cleveland Browns Victory Cooler."

A Browns Victory Cooler, for those who have not had the misfortune of

rooting for the Browns in recent years, was a promotion from Bud Light. The Browns were on a historic losing streak (at one point losing 31 games in a row over two seasons), so Bud Light installed refrigerators in many Cleveland-area bars with padlocks that could not be opened until the Browns broke the streak. Once they did, people at the bar could drink for free.

"We bought a Victory Cooler and now, when we hit our monthly sales goal, we unlock the padlock to celebrate," says Jeff.

Evolution and Accelerated Growth

The company has steadily grown since its inception. But it has really kicked its growth into hyper drive since 2006. In 2006, Conveyer & Caster officially became Conveyer & Caster - Equipment for Industry, following a merger with Cleveland-based distributor Equipment For Industry, Inc.

"That merger was the best thing that ever happened to our company," Jeff says. "It helped put us on the material handling world map, where we focus on casters, material handling and conveyors."

Equipment for Industry, Inc. President **Rick Andrews** stayed with the company through the merger and today serves as Vice President of Engineering at CC-EFI.

"I am not sure any of us really knew what the impact of combining forces of

our two companies would have on our growth," says Rick. "We worked diligently on cross-training our account managers on all products, and were fortunate that many of our key vendor partners were extremely helpful with training as well. The impact was immediate."

Since then, the company has done three more acquisitions, including Advanced Belting & Conveyor Co. in 2007, Anderson Wood & Metal Works, Inc. in 2008, and Storage Systems Co. in 2013. Each of these acquisitions helped CC-EFI travel further down the path to being a turn-key distributor in the industry.

Going Forward

CC-EFI has 50 employees and is a three-time recipient of MHEDA's Most Valuable Partner Award. The company does business with some of the largest, most respected brands in the industry, including Colson, Hytrol, Steel King and WireCrafters.

"Our success is built on relationships," says Trevor. "We feel like we have a leg up to service our customers because we have such deep partnerships with our supply partners. We really can solve our customers' needs, bringing together some of the best vendor partners in the industry."

Going forward, Trevor Stohr sees the company extending into more high-tech solutions with the formation of an integration systems group.

"We have grown tremendously taking care of customers with more low-tech solutions," says Jeff. "We want to grow and expand that, but at the same time, really move more into systems. With Hytrol as a partner, we are able to solve the unique applications of our customers. We are able to merge all of the different vendor partners into one solution and really do a turn-key distribution center project."

Part of what has made CC-EFI so growth-oriented and hungry for expansion is the installation of an outside advisory board.

"We have advisors that are separate from the business, that we pay to meet

quarterly, without exception," says Jeff. "We share with them our data and financials and they really drive excellence and growth in everything that we do."

"In addition to our advisory board, our leadership team meets once a month to discuss all aspects of the business to ensure that there's always support and a team behind each employee and salesperson," added Trevor. "I think our support team being involved with the total experience for

the customer to help solve their problem really differentiates us."

With a tradition of excellence, partnerships with the best suppliers in the industry, a family-oriented staff who is empowered to always go the extra mile, an outside board of advisors that is pushing the company to drive forward and a clear-eyed plan for future growth, CC-EFI is poised to make its next 60 years even more exciting and successful than the first.




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