

Mount Kisco's Curtis Instruments Celebrates Milestone

By Neal Rentz

No question that 2010 has been quite a year for Mount Kisco-based Curtis Instruments. The company celebrated its 50th anniversary on Dec. 9 and its president and CEO, Stuart Marwell, received a glowing endorsement from none other than President Barack Obama.

Marwell, who introduced himself to the president during a November conference with business leaders in India, was told by the commander-in-chief, "You know, I was just reading about your company and you guys are doing good work," Marwell said, "It was a kick to hear it."

Marwell met the president after receiving an e-mail in October from Anand Mahindra, vice chair of Mahindra-Reva, an Indian electric car company for which Curtis Instruments supplies equipment. Mahindra told him President Obama was planning his India trip, and suggested Marwell get in contact with Treasury Department officials to hopefully arrange for a spot in the conference. About two weeks later, Marwell was invited.

He said Obama was "very, very approachable. He likes people. He likes to listen. He's a very good listener. He was actually the moderator of this panel."

For the past half century, Curtis Instruments' American designed and manufactured control systems have been installed in a variety of vehicles and machines, including the lunar roving vehicle on the Apollo space

missions.

"The primary focus of the company is providing controls and instrumentation for electrical vehicles of all types," said Marwell, a Katonah resident. "Until very recently, the majority of electrical vehicles were industrial vehicles—golf cars, medical vehicles like electrical wheelchairs, scooters, airport ground handling equipment. And now, with the advent of lithium ion batteries and a big focus on hybridization of vehicles, a lot more types of vehicles are becoming electric."

The main part of the business, which has roughly 100 employees at its Kisco Avenue offices in Mount Kisco and about 900 worldwide, is still the golf and medical industries, Marwell said. Over the past 35 years, Curtis has established 13 subsidiary companies around the world that has helped to position the firm in Asia and Europe.

"We design our own products. We manufacture our own products. And we market our own products," Marwell said. "We're in total control over our operations."

The Mount Kisco world headquarters, which includes a small distribution center and a site for engineers, is where the visionaries of the company work. It is there where the programs are established, and the commitments are made to move the company forward and communicated to Curtis Instruments' subsidiary companies, Marwell said.

The first CEO of the company was Marwell's father, Edward, who died Sept. 7. The co-founder was Curtis Beusman, who now



Stuart Marwell, CEO of Curtis Instruments, which celebrated its 50th anniversary on Dec. 9. In November, Marwell was one of a group of business leaders who met President Obama.

runs the Saw Mill Club. The name Curtis Instruments was agreed upon because it was Beusman's first name and Edward Marwell's father owned the Curtis Furniture Company in New York City.

Marwell's work for the company began—without pay—at its inception in 1960 when he was 12, completing menial tasks such as sweeping floors. As a youngster he never expected to one day run his father's company, and his parents never pushed him to go into the family business.

But before coming to work full-time in his mid-30s, Marwell took a detour. He earned a

master's in finance and administration from Boston University and worked for a decade in former Boston Mayor Kevin White's administration as the director of the Office of Fiscal Affairs. White opted against running for re-election in 1982, ending Marwell's time in Boston.

"I had about a dozen city departments that reported to me from a policy perspective on fiscal matters," Marwell recalled.

During most of his first 10 years working for his father's company, beginning in 1983, Marwell said he was "expanding the company's footprint, developing new subsidiary companies." Marwell was appointed president and CEO in 2001.

Being a privately owned company has been a major reason Curtis Instruments has been successful for a half-century, he contended.

"We have this philosophy of operation, which we call our Curtis 10 Points. It's not just a bunch of words on a piece of paper. It really is the way we live in the company day to day. It's our operating principals, our ethics," he said.

"One of the reasons why I think it's important to remain private and independent is that some of those 10 points tend to get corrupted when you are (publicly) traded or when you've got outside investors. Some of the larger companies don't operate that way. We have a particular trust here that we've developed over 50 years in the business, and it's something we want to continue into the future."