

WESTCHESTER COUNTY BUSINESS JOURNAL



With The Business Council of Westchester Hall of Fame

Ahead of the times

*Curtis Instruments was
among first U.S. companies
to tap Asian market*

Stuart Marwell, president and CEO
of Curtis Instruments, the 2007
Entrepreneurial Success Award winner.

BY CHRISTINA OCCHIPINTI
christina@westfairinc.com

As a technology company, Curtis Instruments knows a thing or two about innovation, company growth, increased annual sales and commitment to one's community, which is why the Mount Kisco-based company is the 2007 recipient of The Business Council of Westchester's Hall of Fame Entrepreneurial Success Award.

"Our sales have risen about 10 percent each year for the last four years and it's basically been because of the new products we're offering and our global footprint," said Stuart Marwell, president and chief executive officer of Curtis Instruments since 2001. "Curtis started being an international company in 1975 when we opened our first overseas company in the U.K. Today we have 13 foreign subsidiaries and a lot of our growth has come through our investments in the Asian markets."

While many companies have just recently reached out to Asia, which accounts for 15 percent of Curtis' total sales, Marwell said the company's former CEO didn't have any qualms when it came to taking the initiative in an effort to advance his company years ago.

"I have to give that credit to my dad. He loves international business and he wasn't afraid to try something new. He was in China in 1985 — 10 years before they opened the doors there — prospecting for opportunities for the company," Marwell said of his father, Edward, who founded Curtis with his partner, Curtis Beusman, in 1960. "He was very strategic in his thinking. We were one of the very first companies to receive a license to do business in China, way back in 1995 — just a year after they opened up their economy."

With an international presence that boasts seven wholly owned subsidiaries in Asia and eight in Europe, along with its corporate headquarters in Mount Kisco and facilities in California and Puerto Rico, Curtis has made quite a name for itself in various industries, ranging from material handling, medical mobility, golf, aerial lift and telecommunications, among others.

WHEELCHAIR CONTROL SYSTEM

"One of the products I'm most proud of is the enAble product line — a series of motor-control systems for wheelchairs. They come in a couple of different flavors," said Marwell, "but the one that has really hit the market very well is called our enAble 50 product line for rehab chairs. These are very high-end wheel chairs that are used for

people with multiple disabilities and we've created probably the best system out there for our customers."

Curtis Instruments is no stranger to great products that make headlines. In fact, the company created pieces of equipment that have literally been to the moon and back.

"We designed the battery fuel gauge for the elec-

do that, we provide financial support for those organizations," said Marwell, who as a former treasurer and current board member, has been involved with the Boys and Girls Clubs of Northern Westchester for the better part of 20 years. "We have gotten employees involved with community service projects and it's not just here. It's in every country that we work in. We have our 10 Points and these are the guiding principals we use for running our business globally. We have people at every Curtis location that get involved in community programs."

One example of companywide contribution and commitment that stands out in Marwell's mind is Curtis' response to the Gulf Coast communities battered by Hurricane Katrina in 2005. "After ... Hurricane Katrina, through some matching programs with our employees and another company that matched our match, we raised almost \$30,000 just here in Mount Kisco."

With big plans ready to go for the upcoming year, Curtis shows no signs of slowing down under Marwell's direction. The company is preparing to implement a new business system, which "will simplify all the company activity ... by coordinating all the end-user demand using logic to define what products we should be making, where and when," Marwell said.

Curtis will also be doing some national acquisitions to continue the company's growth. "(The companies will) be in the U.S. and they'll be companies that complement what we do. They should not have a strong international presence yet because that's what we bring to the table."

Of all the issues that come hand in hand with being a global company, Marwell said the most taxing is accommodating the demands of the client.

"You have to be very flexible today in a global economy. That's the biggest challenge — the logistics of moving materials around the world. The Internet has been great for telecommunications and moving images and words, but when you have to move a physical product from China to India, or Bulgaria to China ... it's challenging."

For a company created on the cornerstone of innovation, solving this challenge shouldn't pose a problem.

1. Stuart Marwell stands outside of Curtis Instruments' six-year-old corporate headquarters in Mount Kisco, which was designed by famed architect Edward Larrabee Barnes. 2. Curtis Balkan, a subsidiary of Curtis Instruments, has a factory in Sofia, Bulgaria, which opened in 2000. 3. The Curtis China factory in Suzhou, which is in the Jiangsu province.



tric vehicle that the astronauts drove around in when they searched the moon (in 1968)," Marwell said. "It was a big achievement for a small company here in Mount Kisco to be a NASA-certified supplier. That was back in the early to mid-1960s."

10 POINTS, GUIDING PRINCIPLES

When the staff at Curtis isn't working on its latest product line or making a name for the company as an industry-wide leader, they are busy contributing to their communities.

"I encourage all of our people to get involved locally with whatever not-for-profit organizations they feel are important to them and, when they

