

SMART DECISIONS

BY ANDREW JOSEPH, FEATURES EDITOR
PHOTOS BY STEVE PELLERIN

Quebec machine-builder accelerates its fast-growing ways with progressive approach to modern machine design

It's not much of a stretch to say that **Wulftec International Inc.** has done many things right in its 16-year history to become one of the world's leading designers, manufacturers and distributors of complete end-of-the-line packaging solutions, such as strapping and stretch-wrapping equipment and related supplies.

Founded in 1990 in Ayer's Cliff, Que., the company's entrepreneurial spirit, leading-edge engineering capabilities, and a vast pool of human talent quickly earned it international acclaim and recognition for outstanding machine designs, unique features and superb customer service—culminating in its 2002 acquisition by the Greek-based, multinational industrial equipment distribution giant **M.J. Maillis Group**.

By all accounts to date, it was a match



A production line dedicated to manufacturing of modular, semi-automatic Smart Series stretchwrappers.



From left: André Thibault, Wulftec International president and managing director; Martin Pelletier, regional sales manager, Canada; Yanick Marois, production manager.

that significantly strengthened the respective global positions of both firms.

Wulftec's stretchwrappers—distinguished by all-steel structural designs, AC variable-frequency drives and no-nonsense warranties—are backed up by a dedicated team of highly-skilled engineers, designers, programmers, welders, machinists, painters and assembly workers employed at the company's sprawling, state-of-the-art, 136,000-square-foot facility located minutes from the U.S.-Canada border, and a mere 75 miles from Montreal.

Almost right from the outset, Wulftec looked to international markets as its best route to meaningful growth in this extremely competitive market. Today, the company ships an estimated 83 per cent of its machines to the U.S., another 12 per cent across Canada, and the remainder exported to Brazil, Mexico, Italy, Australia, Argentina, Malaysia, U.K., Peru, Puerto Rico, Cuba and South Korea.

In March, the company completed a comprehensive, \$1.5-million plant upgrade—boosting the size of its

Ayer's Cliff facility with an additional 26,000 square feet of production space, while also reorganizing its manufacturing flow to achieve higher productivity and process efficiencies.

"We are very pleased with the expansion results; it has enabled us to shorten our delivery time and process a larger number of orders," Wulftec president and managing director André Thibault told *Automate Now* recently, pointing out that the plant can now produce 40 semi-automatic stretchwrapping machines per week.

"And they aren't sitting around waiting to be sold, either," adds Wulftec production manager Yanick Marois. "All of the equipment we manufacture has a

home; with virtually all semi-automatics being modified to the customers' exact specs."

Thibault concurs: "We will build each and every machine exactly to a customer's specifications."

The continuous growth in the company's staffing levels—from 15 workers in 1990 to 215 employees today—offers compelling proof of a company that is clearly on the right track in terms of defending and

expanding its global market turf. As part of the globally-operating M.J. Maillis Group, which employs about 2,000 people in 19 countries worldwide, Wulftec is a corporate embodiment of everything that is good about economic globalization.

"Wulftec is a stronger company thanks to our affiliation with the M.J. Maillis Group," states Thibault. "We now have worldwide technology at our fingertips, while Wulftec offers the group a chance to expand the scope of their business here in North America."

Thibault says that combined North American sales for Maillis and Wulftec came in at about \$65 million last year, but he expects them to soar to \$125 million over the next 18 months—thanks to the stellar marketplace success of the **Smart Series** of stretchwrapping machines and the **WRWA** horizontal wrappers, as well as further penetration of North American markets by the company's strapping equipment and consumables segment.

Thibault credits Wulftec's success to remaining focused on supplying its clients with the best-made equipment possible.

"Our entire plant is dedicated solely to the design,
Continues on page S4



Yanick Marois uses an Allen-Bradley touchscreen interface to program functions onto a WCRT-200 rotary-arm, fully-automatic stretchwrapper.

SMART DECISIONS

Continued from page S3

development and manufacturing of quality stretch-wrapping and strapping equipment,” he says, adding that the Wulftec factory also boasts a dedicated training room for its employees, as well as a showroom to display its latest products to existing and potential customers.

This commitment to customer satisfaction extends well beyond the stylish equipment design, according to Thibault, to systems installation services, operational training, and after-sales service and maintenance.

In fact, Wulftec displays a remarkably non-secretive approach to customer relations, continually welcoming distributors and customers alike on facility tours—showing off the quality manufacturing processes used to fabricate and customize their machines.

Going these extra steps is well worth the effort, as far as Thibault is concerned.

“Wulftec has been able to expand after its solid sales growth of 25 per cent in 2005, which is pretty good when you consider the economic setting and our strong Canadian dollar,” explains Thibault. “And even though 83 per cent of all of Wulftec’s products are exported to the U.S., we still increased our 2005 sales by 15 per cent.”

Part of Wulftec’s success can be traced to its unfailing ability to create stretchwrapping machines to cover virtually every aspect of the packaging industry’s needs—as illustrated by the company’s recently-launched *Smart Series* of stretchwrappers. Designed with built-in modularity, the *Smart Series*, simply put, is a way for Wulftec customers to continue



Thanks to the melding of companies, Wulftec now manufactures M.J. Maillis strapping machines, like this fully-automatic Vario Master 9461 machine with compression force up to 2,200 pounds.

tons are modular, the end-user could pull one out and replace it with one they prefer,” says Thibault.

Adds Marois: “Another cool feature is that the machine can be broken down quite easily into separate



A SEW Eurodrive motor powers the film carriage of the WRVA-200 automatic horizontal stretchwraper.

modules or components, which means that shipping costs can be dramatically reduced.

“It’s pretty much just plug-and-play,” says Marois, adding that most customers can affix the new modules on their own, with just the aid of the instruction manual.

To extend this modularity further, Wulftec typically uses only the most commonly available parts on all of its equipment, such as **Rockwell Automation’s Allen-Bradley** family of controls, **Baldor Electric Company** motors, and **Peerless-Winsmith Inc.** gearboxes.

“We do not use proprietary parts in our machines,” extols Thibault. “If you need a part, you don’t have to buy it from us.

“While we could over-night a part to you, the end-user could also buy the necessary part locally, if need be. For example, if you are in Minnesota and you need an Allen-Bradley part, instead of purchasing it from us here in Canada, you could just go to the local Allen-Bradley supplier and buy it from them.”

Thibault says he is convinced that Wulftec’s continuing success will only be reinforced in light of the recent decision by Maillis to move its North American strapping machinery business to Quebec.

At the moment, it produces three different strapping machine models—**Power Master**, **Vario Master 9460** and the **Vario Master 9440**—specifically intended for end-users in the construction, metalworking, paper-board and lumber industries.

“The Maillis Power Master is specifically tailored to the corrugated and printing industries,” explains Marois. “It has an all-electric design that performs faster and more consistently, with fewer maintenance issues than competing products.

“The 9460 is an automatic high-performance strapping machine with the head positioned horizontally above the load,” adds Marois, “while the 9440 is a side-seal strapping machine with a movable head side-mounted on the arch.”

The company also distributes a complete line of strapping tools using steel strapping made by **Maillis Strapping Systems USA** in Fountain Inn, S.C.: **Megadyn** high-tensile and **Dynaflex** regular strapping, and the polyester **Tensium** strapping, available in regular- and extra-strength versions—in a variety of widths, thicknesses and winding styles.

“We’ve built our reputation on strength, reliability and durability,” sums up Thibault. “We’ve got stretch-wrapping for product protection and strapping for packaging, and if we don’t have a machine that’s perfect for your situation, we’ll sit down with you and create it.” □

stretchwrapping equipment was created to offer more flexibility to the customer, according to Wulftec, so that upgrades to the machinery can be made whenever it is feasible for customers to do so.

“Just because the flow of your business operations has changed, it doesn’t mean you should have to purchase a brand new stretchwrapper,” explains Wulftec sales manager Priscille Tremblay.

“With the Smart Series machines, you can customize your stretchwrapper weeks, months, or even years after you bought it. So you don’t have to purchase a new machine, just new modules that are easy to remove and attach.”

There are currently 10 semi-automatic base models in the *Smart Series* of stretchwrappers. This includes four versions of low-profile semi-automatics (**SML-150**, **SML-200**, **SML-EXT** and the **SML-277**); four versions of the high profile machine (**SMH-150**, **SMH-200**, **SMH-SPL** and **SMH-HVY**); and two dual-turntable version (**SML-200 Dual** and the **SMH-200 Dual**).

While each high-profile stretchwrapper has unique variations of the 51-inch turntable, for example, they also share many similar characteristics, including an 80-inch wrap height and a 20-inch **No Thread** powered pre-stretch carriage.

Tremblay says that the modularity of the *Smart Series* machines is a key selling point.

“To use an example, the end-user can order a push-button control or a PLC (programmable logic controller); and, since the control panel but-



The Ayer’s Cliff facility manufactures film carriage heads for use in Wulftec stretchwrappers made there, while sending about 50 per month to a sister facility in Italy.

For more information on:

Wulftec International Inc.	450
Maillis Strapping Systems USA	451
Rockwell Automation	452
Baldor Electric Company	453
Peerless-Winsmith Inc.	454