



# CHARTING NEW WATERS

Nova Scotian water bottler uses state-of-the-art, made-in-Canada stretchwrapping system to keep surging output flowing on even keel

With population of less than 5,000 people, Stellarton hardly comes across as a likely home base for one of corporate Canada's largest business concerns, but nevertheless, this Nova Scotian community—situated about 160 kilometers east of Halifax—does boast a fairly significant share of national influence when it comes to the pecking order of the country's grocery retailing establishment.

Stellarton just happens to be, you see, home to the headquarters of **Sobeys Inc.**—a dynamic Canadian grocery retail concern operating more than 1,300 supermarkets and grocery outlets across all 10 of the country's provinces, while also serving thousands of wholesale customers from coast to coast.

It also owns and operates a company called **Big 8 Beverages**, a Stellarton-based soft-drink manufacturer that produces and distributes a variety of beverages to Sobeys' internal and external customers.

Producing and warehousing carbonated soft-drinks (CSDs) since the plant came on-line in 1986, Big 8 expanded into the bottled water business in 1999, and last year completed a major expansion of both the bottled water and the CSD production capacity. The comprehensive, \$5-million

upgrade boosted the plant's size to 47,000 square feet of production space, which now houses four fully automated lines, staffed by 22 full-time employees.

The Big 8 Stellarton facility—fully certified by the **National Sanitation Foundation (NSF)**—now boasts impressive annual capacity to pump out over 7.7 million cases of 24 SKUs (stock-keeping units) of product, as well as storage capacity for 2,000 fully-loaded pallets.

With its 10-hours-a-day, five-days-a-week work schedule, the plant operates at such brisk pace that it turns over its entire warehouse inventory every seven to nine days.

Such efforts have not gone unnoticed by industry peers—the plant has been a recipient of the coveted *Excellence in Manufacturing Award* of the **Canadian Bottled Water Association (CBWA)** for four consecutive years.

"The expansion in 1999 was supposed to last us 10 years," Big 8 production supervisor Kevin McNutt told *Canadian Packaging* in a recent interview. "But in three years, we were at [full] capacity and then some. That is what prompted us to do another expansion so rapidly.

"We have automated our whole plant from start to finish," McNutt explains. "The bottles are put on our lines by depalletizers. Then they are automatically rinsed, filled, capped, labeled, coded, packed, palletized and wrapped with the Wulftec machine, before being discharged out into our warehouse."

The Wulftec machine mentioned by McNutt is the fully-automatic WCRT 125 stretchwrapping system made by end-of-line packaging equipment manufacturer **Wulftec International Inc.** of Ayers Cliff, Que., and installed at the Big 8 plant by Wulftec's local distributor **Cabot Shipping Supplies** of

Dartmouth, N.S.

Founded in 1990, Wulftec was acquired in 2002 by the **M.J. Maillis Group**, a European-based industrial machinery conglomerate specializing in the design, manufacture and distribution of turnkey, end-of-line packaging systems—including all sorts of



The fully-automatic Wulftec WCRT 125 stretchwrapper enabled the Stellarton plant to cut manpower costs and eliminate wasteful, and hazardous, plastic tails on pallet wraps.

strapping, stretchwrapping and shrinkwrapping materials and equipment.

Cabot Shipping Supplies—Atlantic Canada's largest stocking distributor of shipping room, packaging, and material handling supplies—operates a 10,000-square-foot facility in Dartmouth, just outside of Halifax, distributing a comprehensive line of products as regional representative for a number of notable packaging companies, including the likes of **Intertape Polymer Group**, **Signode Distribution Products**, **Sealed Air of Canada** and **The Packaging Group**.

Cabot sales representative Nicole Gale is quick to stress that practically every stretchwrapping installation is unique in one way or another, and the Big 8 installation had more than its share of obstacles to overcome: space restrictions, making the system work hand-in-hand with the plant's existing **Priority One** palletizer, harmonizing it with the plant's overall production flow, tight delivery schedule, and gaining a solid understanding of production challenges in a beverage environment.

Gale gives full credit to the solid design and engineering that went into the building of the WCRT 125 machine, and the value-added features the system offers, for making the Big 8 installation largely a problem-free experience.

"The WCRT 125 has many great features that fit the Big 8 installation and the beverage plant's operations," says Gale. "It comes completely factory-tested, with the 'quick-connect cabling' ensuring there are no mistakes made during the set-up, while the rugged design features on WCRT 125, such as the dual-chain carriage lift, are well above those of other machines, because most other machines are using a single chain or belt for the lift system."

All Wulftec stretchwrappers feature standard close



Nicole Gale of Cabot Shipping Supplies (left) and Big 8 Beverages production supervisor Kevin McNutt.

roller spacing, with 2.5x3-inch centers, to allow for smooth pallet transfer and enhanced weight distribution over the roller bed.

The WCRT 125 models are outfitted with AC motors, regulated by vari-

able frequency controllers, to ensure optimal speed control and reliability, with the user-friendly Allen-Bradley PanelView 550 operator interface from **Rockwell Automation** providing complete diagnostic display to assist with the isolating of alarm conditions.

The Wulftec WCRT replaced an old semi-automatic system that, according to McNutt, deserved to be put to pasture some time ago.

"We had to take a forklift and place a pallet in front of the wrapper," he recalls. "Then the operator would jump off the forklift and press a button that would start the wrapping.

"Now we have everything set up so that we have three of our four lines feeding this one Wulftec wrapper," he says. "There is no operator present where it wraps the pallet and breaks the wrap, and where it discharges the wrapped load into our warehouse to be put away, slotted into storage, or taken to a trailer."

The Wulftec machine also comes with a very handy feature that enables it to cut the film and apply a special brush that wipes the film's tail back to the pallet, so that it doesn't start to unravel in the warehouse.

"With our old system, you walked out to the warehouse and there were all these plastic tails hanging everywhere," recalls McNutt. "We don't have that problem anymore: this system here is just superb."

McNutt says that having such productivity-enhancing capabilities is all part-and-parcel of keeping up with the Canadians' seemingly insatiable thirst for bottled water.

"The biggest thing that is happening for us right now is obviously the fact that the bottled water boom is driving the tremendous amount of growth that we are seeing here at our facility," he says. "The carbonated soft-drinks, as most people would concur, are just keeping the pace, so to speak, but there isn't a tremendous amount of growth taking place.

"Nowadays, everybody is looking for something that is more refreshing, more health-conscious, and something that is portable," he sums up. "That's where water has really taken the place of pretty much every other beverage out there, and that's where we see the real growth opportunities for our facility." □



Big 8 Beverages turns out about 7.7 million cases of product annually at its Stellarton plant.

For more information on:	
<b>Wulftec International Inc.</b>	<b>488</b>
<b>Cabot Shipping Supplies</b>	<b>489</b>
<b>Rockwell Automation</b>	<b>490</b>