

# Rubber & Plastics News®

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## BEST PLACES TO WORK

2020

# Hallstar works to instill proper culture

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CHICAGO—There's clearly a difference between a company's ledger and its legacy.

But success in one certainly can drive success in the other.

For Hallstar Industrial Solutions, a maker of additives and modifiers for the rubber and plastics industries, creating the correct culture provides an atmosphere where employees can feel appreciated while also working to make the company stronger.

It's this combination that helped Hallstar to be named as one of this year's Best Places to Work in the rubber industry for 2020.

Hallstar Industrial Solutions makes products that help rubber perform under different, and sometimes difficult, conditions. Markets include aerospace, automotive, and wire and cable. The firm is part of Hallstar Co., a Chicago-based holding company that also includes a beauty care division and shared services segment that provides back office support to each of the operating firms.

Hallstar was founded in 1986 when John Paro began what he described as largely a distribution business fashioned from a handful of acquisitions. Over time, the company evolved into a maker of additives and modifiers and left the distribution side. Starting on the industrial



The leadership at Hallstar Industrial Solutions instills a culture where employees feel appreciated.

side, the company also found applications for products in the personal care segment, including skin and sunscreen products.

"Our products are tried and true and being innovated all the time. And we're blessed with some very, very long-tenured and good people that see a privately held company that is looking to stay around for a long time and continue to grow as a

good place to work and develop," Paro said. "The business is always changing for the positive in a way that gives both young people and long-tenured people alike new opportunities to grow and develop. I think that's one of the keys."

As president of the Industrial Solutions seg-



Paro



Hallstar executives say the firm is successful because of its products and its team.

ment, Carmen Masciantonio does not see his job as singularly focused on the bottom line.

"I don't know that there are any secrets," he said. "It's treating everybody the way you want to be treated."

Plenty of people have made plenty of money by writing business philosophy books, but for Masciantonio, his approach flows from the Golden Rule.



**Employees of the company knew 2020 would be challenging, but the company still was able to reach its goals for the year.**

“We just want to give people all the opportunities they can get and treat them well,” he said. “And develop and try to have some fun. Winning helps. It’s good to win.”

Paro has established a company that allows for flexibility and patience and empowerment.

“We’re just trying to get everyone on the same page, treat everyone well and develop everybody and have some fun, too,” Masciantonio said.

The Industrial Solutions president said he feels empowered working for a private company that considers more than just the balance sheet when determining success. Hallstar also tries to cut through the clutter “to eliminate as much non-value-added things as possible.”

Hallstar, like any company, is going to make mistakes along the way.

“We’re going to learn as much as we can from them and keep going,” he said. “We’re going to pick ourselves up when things don’t go our way and we’re going to keep going.”

Paro added, “You don’t always get it right. But when it does come together ... it’s pretty magical to watch

what happens.”

Hallstar has been successful because of its product line over the years, but that’s not the only reason, Paro said.

“We also have a set of core values and culture and philosophy about work that we’ve always taken very seriously and we put it front and center,” he said. Those values include being passionate about people, operating ethically, being committed to continuous learning and being results driven.

While accountability and integrity are important, the company also wants employees to enjoy their work-life journey.

“Everybody in that group knows they are something special,” Paro said about the Industrial Solutions segment. “They know they can win when they team together. They enjoy each other’s company. There’s a lot of good humor that goes on in that business, just having some fun along the way. They take their jobs very seriously, but they have a philosophy about it.”

This year could have been a time

when Hallstar found itself in the loss column, considering the impact of COVID-19 on the business world. But the company relied on its culture when things started to go sideways, realized that not everything is in its control and responded appropriately, Masciantonio said.

“You have to be intellectually honest and say, ‘What can we learn from this?’ and keep going,” he said. “You’ve got to have a short memory, thick skin and always think about the next play. Sometimes that’s hard.”

Masciantonio commonly slips in sports references, and it’s for good reason. He was a linebacker at “Linebacker U,” the Penn State University football team, which won the 1982 national championship during his time on the squad.

COVID-19 made things harder this year, but Hallstar Industrial Solutions pulled together to meet its financial goals despite the challenges. And that means employees will share in the financial success.

Winning during difficult times comes when the right people are on board, Masciantonio said.

“We have to have people around us with character, and we want to make sure they all understand that we all win together and they have to feel safe, that management wants to do the right thing. We still have work to do, but the foundation of the company is strong,” he said. “You get results from people. ... If we can get people believing in each other, working together, having fun, we’ll be OK.”

Having a business philosophy that extends beyond the balance sheet is important to Paro.

“The reason is I’d like to retire down the road, and I’d like to look at this much more broadly than the financial objectives,” he said.