



Young entrepreneurs Tony and Tai Wang show off some of their earliest product lines.



WAC LIGHTING

Businesses today are scrambling to portray themselves as “green” and accountable not only to clients, but the environment. One manufacturer has been doing just that for a quarter of a century. Tai and Tony Wang, owners of the 25-year-old Garden City, N.Y.-based WAC Lighting, founded their company on the basis of their values, which include ecological awareness and giving back to the community.

“While responsibility is the popular philosophy of companies today, it is a belief we have had since starting our business. We have always worked to deliver quality, efficient product by taking control of the entire process ourselves,” explains Shelley Wang, the couple’s daughter and the firm’s vp/general manager.

From the time Tony Wang began importing decorative and task lighting in 1984, he recognized technology was changing how

homes would be illuminated. “We were distributing torchieres and portables as well as task lights with halogens, which were becoming very popular,” Tony notes.

Halogen was the light source of choice for a new type of track lighting: low voltage. Wang, however, did not jump on the trend. “Some say I am too conservative,” he admits, “but we felt the category was not reliable enough at the time. There were many failures, mainly because transformer technology was not catching up to the applications.”

In 1989, however, Wang secured a supplier who was producing a dependable transformer. “That is when we decided to build the business in low-voltage lighting. It was a big step in efficiency – three to five times more than line voltage. We assembled the transformer heads right in our College Point [N.Y.] factory be-

cause we wanted to maintain total quality control,” he relates.

The line soon included recessed housings and trims. By 1993, the company was gaining national recognition. To expand its presence even more, WAC Lighting opened its first permanent showroom in the Dallas Market Center®.

As the manufacturing trend evolved, Wang moved all assembly to a 250,000-sq.-ft. facility in Dongguan, China in 1997 and established a West Coast distribution facility in City of Industry, Calif. to support the volume.

Recognizing the importance of customer trust and quality controls, Wang immediately began the process to obtain ISO-9001 certification, which it achieved one year later. Today, WAC Lighting’s factory measures 750,000 square feet, handles 90 percent of the fabrication, and is joined by sales offices



WAC Lighting's latest model is an LED-lamped fixture for high-end display applications, which capitalizes on the lamp source's strengths of directionality and brilliance.

in Beijing and Shanghai.

The manufacturing site has added several operations to achieve environmental stewardship. All water is recycled and the property has reached zero-landfill capability. It also employs stringent sourcing to encourage equally green practices among its suppliers.

"We have changed our logo and tagline to 'Responsible Lighting.' We want our customers to know they can rely on our quality and delivery," Shelley remarks. "To do that, we are taking more of the manufacturing operations into our factory."

Tony asserts that WAC Lighting also makes its own unique molds and dies. "We have in-house tooling for customization plus we powdercoat and do not use lead-based paints," he asserts.

The plant recently received UL certification for its on-site testing

laboratory on the Dongguan campus. "We are proud to be certified for UL's Witness Test Data Program. Product testing can be performed in our own labs and witnessed by a UL engineer at our facility instead of shipping product samples for evaluation in UL labs. The designation supports our competency and is another step towards a completely integrated manufacturing operation,"

Tony notes. The lab meets UL standards for endurance, durability, reliability, temperature, electrical components, lamp and luminaire performance, plus mechanical safety. Equipment is currently being added to test lighting applications as well as photometrics.

In addition to their vow of responsibility to customers, the Wang family also looks out for many of their 750 staffers. In 1999 a library was installed in the factory and more than 100 employees have gotten college degrees with WAC's support.

"When we first opened 12 years ago, most of the workers had never used computers," explains Tai Wang. "We began by teaching everyone how to type, and then gradually how to operate the computer. Now 99 percent use computers and prefer them. Not all factories permit such access,

so this gives our employees an incentive to stay. It is all about the people."

"Some say that training factory workers will encourage them to leave for better paying jobs, but I say that even if 10 people earn degrees and nine leave, I have gained one qualified employee," Tony states. "After the holidays, a lot of factories have to shut down when workers don't return, but we have many loyal employees. Investing in our people is good business."

The Wangs donate their time as well as funds for many causes. Tai is a contributing founder of the Alliance for Smiles (AFS). The five-year-old international group provides constructive surgery for children suffering from cleft lip and palate abnormalities. Tai has served as fund-raiser, liaison, administrator, and translator on several missions to China.

"The group is based in San Francisco and during last year's fall tour we had a team of 35 people, including nurses and anesthesiologists as well as three surgeons. We worked for two weeks and were able to help 155 children," she relates.

Tai has also been WAC Lighting's liaison to the Gift of Life, Inc., a program supported by Rotary International that helps children born with heart defects. She has been directly involved in transporting Chinese children to the U.S., staying at their bedsides, and aiding in translation. Her work with the Chinese community in the U.S. and China earned her the Ellis Island Medal of Honor two years ago, which is presented by the National Ethnic Coalition of Organizations Foundation and given to outstanding American citizens who have distinguished themselves within their specific ethnic groups.

Tai's fund-raising skills reached



The Wang family's commitment to giving back to the community is further reflected by WAC Lighting providing the utmost value to its customers.

a new high last year when she was able to amass \$250,000 in two weeks for the victims of the earthquakes in China.

Inspired by her mother's actions, Shelley was recently named to the board of directors of the New York Asian Women's Center (NYAWC), a culture counseling shelter that she has been associated with since college.

"We have evolved from a resource for Asian women and children suffering domestic violence to include seminars to help empower women. We offer assistance in 14 Asian languages and have initiated a human trafficking recovery program," Shelley explains. The NYAWC receives 3,000+ calls annually to its hotline. Of the women the agency serves, more than 70 percent enroll in vocational or English language training. The Center also works to raise public awareness.

Encouraging education in lighting is naturally on the company's agenda. WAC Lighting has established a scholarship to support a graduate student at the Troy, N.Y.-based Lighting Research Center at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. "We are proud to support the LRC's education program," Tony says. "We view our scholarship as an investment in the future of the lighting industry."

As new light sources have brought about further possibilities

in fixtures, Tony sees an evolution. "For us, it has always been about niche concepts – offering products that do more in a particular application and do it the most efficiently," he asserts. "We have interpreted that to now mean no more incandescents."

In 2009, the company is weaning its product line off incandescent light sources. According to Sean Tham, vp/marketing, that translates into developments in LEDs and CFLs. "Our job is to find the best use for the latest technology, which has changed so much in the past three years alone, particularly in smaller and smarter lamps," he remarks. While bulb makers and ballast suppliers visit the factory on a quarterly basis to review the newest products, Tham laments that socket manufacturers are not following fast enough. He and the Wangs visit the European lighting shows to become versed in the latest developments. The result is an expansion of LED and CFL collections for 2009.

Last year's entrée into LEDs with WAC's InvisiLED peel-and-stick fixtures for use in mini coves, accent lighting, and hospitality venues has been followed with a new showcase fixture for high-end retail displays.

"This is another example of how we use light sources where they are best served and how we do it a bit differently than other

manufacturers," Shelley contends. "LEDs' best features are that they generate low heat, are small, and produce no ultraviolet radiation to fade merchandise. They are also available in color temperatures from 3000K to 6000K and are very directional. These are qualities that can be best applied to display lighting."

LEDs are also appearing in the company's track heads for accent and retail applications as well as some undercabinet designs. "These are 9 and 18 watts and have a narrow beam angle ranging from 10 to 30 degrees. We think they are better than halogen for certain applications," Tham notes.

"Monorail has been a huge category for us and is growing consistently with each collection of art glass pendants we introduce," Tham continues. For 2009, the Pacific Northwest collection features glass made in the U.S. paired with CFL lamping. A second decorative series of cased opal glass boasts hand-carving in geometric and leafy patterns. To add to the interest, all cords are fabric-coated.

"Another example of how we do things differently is our newest finish – Antique Bronze – which we have on our latest track fixtures with a retro feel," Shelley adds. The finish has a brushed appearance with lighter highlights, while the designs recall industrial fittings and hardware of the 1940s.

What is on the horizon? With its array of specification-grade products expanding, WAC Lighting plans to devote additional resources to creating more industry awareness of its two-year-old W2 Architectural Lighting division. For the formerly named Wang's Alliance Corporation, it will undoubtedly mean teamwork from all levels of the enterprise, and a continued fellowship that will extend from customers to community. ❖