



People

## Widely diversified

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Donald Deubel – who has had overall responsibility for KHS USA since December 2019 – can't be easily fooled, at least when it comes to packaging. He meets the high demands his new job makes of him by setting ambitious goals for both himself and the company.

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### PHOTOGRAPHY / ILLUSTRATION

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### COVER PHOTO

Donald Deubel's goals for KHS include generating growth in the plastics business, completing projects even more punctually and attracting young specialists to the company.

Donald Deubel was introduced to entrepreneurship and independence at home at an early age: his father was one of the largest independent Goodyear tire dealers in the state of Michigan – and both a role model and mentor for his two sons. However, he talked his sons out of their idea of following in his footsteps and taking over the business: he perceived early on that the tire manufacturer would be focusing more and more on company-owned sales and distribution in the future and predicted a decline in the prospects for independent dealerships.

Deubel also bid farewell to another long-cherished dream in adulthood: after years of match practice, he abandoned his aspirations of becoming a professional ice hockey player. “At some point I decided that my life shouldn’t revolve around sports from dawn to dusk, 365 days a year,” Deubel explains and laughs. “After all, I also wanted to go out, meet girls and have a beer with my friends.”

Beyond sports, he adopted a two-prong approach during his studies: Deubel devoted his time both to business, focusing in particular on project management, and to plastics technology. “Plastic was still relatively new in the early 1980s,” he recalls. “College lectures and seminars focused mainly on the injection molding process and the automotive industry where the material was primarily used. I wasn’t particularly interested in this sector but was convinced that there was a future for plastics in packaging – even if this was still in its infancy in 1984. That’s why my primary interest was in extrusion blow molding and stretch blow molding technology – at a time when containers were mostly made of glass and aluminum.” Accordingly, his first job took him to the American subsidiary of Bekum, an extrusion blow molding machine manufacturer headquartered in Germany. What Deubel was particularly enthusiastic about at the time were the enormous growth opportunities on the market on the one hand and the attraction of new innovations emanating from both the material and the machines on the other.

## **Extensive expertise**

From this point on, the variety and breadth of the issues in which he was involved were formative for his professional career which was not by coincidence but the result of a very deliberate commitment. “I decided early on to base my knowledge on a broadest possible foundation instead of specializing in a particular field,” he explains. “This gave me the opportunity, for example, to become familiar with many different markets and industries, ranging from food and beverages through healthcare, personal care, household and chemical to automotive. And at the same time, I was able to acquire extensive technical expertise in various types of plastics processing, such as extrusion blow molding, injection blow molding, stretch blow molding, injection molding and thermoforming.”

Donald Deubel describes the spin-off and initial public offering of plastic packaging manufacturer Constar by his then-employer Crown, Cork & Seal in November 2002 as one of the most important milestones in his professional career. As a member of the executive management board he was responsible for Corporate Technologies, which included the research, development and engineering design of plastic containers from the initial concept to commercialization. “It was a very exciting time for me both personally and professionally,” he recalls. “I suddenly changed from being a small fish in a large pond to a large fish in a small pond.” From one day to the next, his responsibility had grown enormously – a challenge that Donald Deubel wasn’t afraid of facing. The greatest appeal for him at this time, however, was to see his team’s packaging on the shelves at the point of sale. One special highlight that he fondly remembers is converting the Arizona Iced Tea product from glass to PET bottles.

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Donald Deubel  
President & CEO, KHS USA

**About the person: Donald Deubel**

The hallmark of the 57-year-old is his enormously wide range of expertise as evidenced not only by his degrees in business administration and plastics engineering technology but also by his work for a wide variety of applications on the one hand and in all kinds of plastics processes on the other. After his first job in process engineering, he worked for various packaging manufacturers for several decades. He joined KHS in February 2018.

## **Back to the machines**

Deubel joined the KHS team in the USA in early 2018 after holding other positions. “After working in the packaging industry for many years, I wanted to return to the machine side of the business and expand my experience in the field of flexible packaging.” He was chief operating officer at KHS’ site in Sarasota, Florida, from April to December 2019 before becoming president and CEO of KHS USA in late 2019, holding overall responsibility for the Sarasota plant and the Waukesha plant in Wisconsin.

When asked how his life has changed since then, Deubel replies, “I’d been in my new position for just two months when I suddenly had to deal with the corona crisis – a task for which no one in a comparable position is prepared. As a management team, we want to balance the health and safety of our employees with that of the company. But under these circumstances, satisfying customers and protecting our employees while making money for the company is a challenge that demands a great deal of attention, both personally and professionally.”

The goals Donald Deubel has set for himself for the near future include rapid growth, especially in the plastics business, further optimization of KHS’ on-time, in full (OTIF) completion of projects and attracting young specialists to KHS.

Although his free time is of course extremely limited working in a job that requires him to be available around the clock, he still enjoys golf and water sports, riding his Harley-Davidson and spending time with his family which also includes two German Shepherds.