

## FEATURE INTERJUTE

# InterJute celebrates 50th Anniversary



Bring out the bunting...run up the flags...trumpet a fanfare! Clear out the warehouse...set-up the disco and gaming tables! A long-time supplier of bags to the



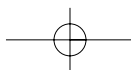
fertilizer industry reached its half-century this year!

InterJute, headquartered in Hulst in the Dutch province of Zeeland, is one of Europe's largest suppliers of synthetic, cotton, jute and mixed fibre bags. The company can trace its roots back to 1 March 1958 when Mr. Arend Wessels was appointed a Director of Benny Cohen's Jutemaatschappij (Benny Cohen Jute Company); this had been founded in 1927 by a Jewish-American family to trade in jute bags but had ceased trading before World War Two when the owners escaped to the Americas. Initially, finance for Arend's venture was provided in part from the United States but the American backers were bought-out in 1963, new funds were found from within the Netherlands and the company was renamed Internationale Jute Maatschappij (*International Jute Company* or InterJute).

Initially, Arend concentrated on trading in second-hand jute bags, used primarily for the shipping of cocoa beans, coffee beans, wheat and flour. The contraction of the used jute bag market – volumes processed declined in the late 1970s from 24 million to 10 million bags per year – prompted the company to switch from the used jute bag trade to the manufacture and printing of synthetic bags, mainly made of polypropylene. Today, jute bags account for barely 1% of the company's turnover and no jute bags are kept in stock. Initially, the polypropylene bags were used mainly to export sugar, flour etc. from Europe to developing countries but, over time, markets have changed, bag technology and customer requirements have moved on. For example, 50 kg bags have become less popular and FIBCs (flexible intermediate bulk containers or "big bags") in their various guises have become the package of choice in many industries/markets while the time horizon expectations of customers with regard to response times for requests for bags have shortened considerably.



InterJute has adapted to these developments; currently, the company's large stocks comprise mainly standard 25 kg and 50 kg bags for packaging wheat flour, fertilizer, malt and other



## FEATURE INTERJUTE

commodities as such bags are in constant demand. Bag printing standards and speeds have been raised and delivery dates telescoped, helped by the increased speeds associated with containerisation. Stocks of FIBCs are kept at minimal levels, due to the specific nature of the FIBC design required by each customer/product/market. To improve response times to customer requests, centres of operation have also been extended beyond Hulst to include a network of agents extending from South America to North Africa and offices in Cadiz and Bucharest.

Today, InterJute remains a family business. Arend withdrew from day-to-day operational involvement in the business in 1974 and InterJute is now headed by Arend's sons Ron and Ed Wessels. On 20 June, to celebrate fifty years in business, the brothers organized a spectacular 50th anniversary party. One of the company's bag warehouses at Hulst was



converted into a magnificent night club and local and international colleagues, agents, representatives, clients and other guests enjoyed a sensational evening. The entertainment reflected the "old and new" theme of the celebration; the roulette wheels span, the flamenco dancers stamped out a staccato rhythm and the break dancers gyrated in time to the music. InterJute bags were used as canvases by real-time graffiti and acrylic painting artists; Ed Wessels provided inspiration for the artists with anecdotes of InterJute's history. At the end of the evening, the resulting "art bags" were auctioned, the proceeds pooled with the "house winnings" from the roulette tables, doubled by the Wessels' brothers, and the resulting funds were donated to the charity *Artsen zonder Grenzen* ("Doctors without Borders").

An evening to remember...and a fitting celebration of the efforts of two generations. ■

