

The AICC logo features the letters 'AICC' in a white, sans-serif font, with a stylized yellow 'i' that has a dot above it. The logo is set against a blue rectangular background.

# BOY SCORE

A PUBLICATION OF AICC, THE INDEPENDENT PACKAGING ASSOCIATION

November/December 2023

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A photograph of two men standing in front of industrial machinery. The man on the left is bald, wearing glasses, a dark blazer, and a light blue shirt. The man on the right has short brown hair, is smiling, and wearing a dark plaid blazer over a light blue shirt. The background is a blue industrial setting with various panels and equipment.

## WELCOME, AICC 2023–2024 CHAIRMAN, MATT DAVIS

Carrying an impressive packaging pedigree, the Association's new board leader emphasizes the 'Independent Advantage'

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# BOX SCORE

AICC

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# ABOUT AICC

## PROVIDING BOXMAKERS WITH THE KNOWLEDGE NEEDED TO THRIVE IN THE PAPER-BASED PACKAGING INDUSTRY SINCE 1974

We are a growing membership association that serves independent corrugated, folding carton, and rigid box manufacturers and suppliers with education and information in print, in person, and online. AICC membership is for the full company, and employees at all locations have access to member benefits. AICC offers free online education to all members to help the individual maximize their potential and the member company maximize its profit.

## WHEN YOU INVEST AND ENGAGE, AICC DELIVERS SUCCESS.

# The 'Independent Advantage'

I'm so proud and honored to be your AICC chairman. I have been attending AICC events for as long as I can remember; in fact, many of our family vacations growing up were tied to AICC events. I would not be the leader I am, and we would not be the company we are, without participating in AICC. We learn something at every AICC meeting. AICC has been there to help guide Packaging Express at each stage of our growth. I love this industry, and I am excited to be an ambassador for AICC.

I am third generation in the box business. My grandfather, T.J. McLaughlin, was in the business from the 1930s through the 1960s. My father, Jim Davis, got into the business and eventually was fortunate enough to partner with the DeLine family. Our families have been intertwined for the past 40-plus years. You cannot say boxes in Colorado and not think of the DeLine and Davis families. The DeLine family has been great to us, and my older brother, Pete, is the general manager at DeLine Box. We could not do what we are doing without that strategic partnership.

The box business is in my blood. My uncles, Jack McLaughlin (CCI and Greif) and Ray Ryden (Boise Cascade); cousin, Jim McLaughlin (WSA-USA); and my younger brother, Tom Davis (Bahmueller and BCM Inks and now partner at Brown Brothers Harriman), all work or have worked in the industry. I have also hired my cousin's son, Andrew Bell (fourth generation for our family), into the business.

Part of what we are going to do in the next year is embrace and honor the past. There are no overnight success stories in the box business. It takes years of hard work to build something really special. We have a rich history as an Association, and we are going to have a big celebration in the spring in Palm Desert, California, to honor 50 years of AICC. We will recognize and celebrate all of those individuals who have been a part of forming this wonderful organization.

During their term, the chairman or chairwoman designates a theme for the year. My theme is what I call the "Independent Advantage." The Independent Advantage is how we survive and strive. It's our edge. It's part of what makes up our competitive advantage, but it is deeper than that. It is doing what other companies cannot do or are not willing to do. It starts with the right people. It's how we treat people, internally and externally. It's how we operate our business. It's the personal connections we must have with our employees and our customers.

The Independent Advantage is how we communicate. It is consistent communication and, more importantly, the ease of communication with our employees, customers, vendors, and peers. It's entrusting and empowering our employees and coworkers with the tools to say yes. It's giving your team the responsibility and power to influence your business. It is the process of trusting your employees to do the right thing when no one is watching. It's an ease of doing business for your customers and vendors.

As independents, we are creative, flexible, and scrappy. We can pivot on a dime. But the advantage is realized by the companies that can do it and do it well.

It's speed! It's our sense of urgency that other companies may not have. It's training your employees and showing them how they impact your business. It's how we gain, train, retain, and, most importantly, reward. It's operating with an entrepreneurial spirit.

It is leaning on and learning from other companies in our industry. AICC is the network, but the Independent Advantage is how we use the network. I am looking forward to a great year, and it truly is a privilege to represent all of you.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Matthew M. Davis". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Matthew M. Davis  
President, Packaging Express  
AICC Chairman



# WELCOME, AICC 2023–2024 CHAIRMAN, MATT DAVIS



Photos by Scott Wilson.



Hear more of Davis' story on *Breaking Down Boxes*, wherever you listen to podcasts.

## Carrying an impressive packaging pedigree, the Association's new board leader emphasizes the 'Independent Advantage'

By Robert Bittner

Incoming AICC Chairman Matt Davis' family has been succeeding in the boxmaking business for three generations. Yet, perhaps surprisingly, the grandfather, uncle, brothers, and father who built their careers in the industry never actually worked for the same company. Instead, each was encouraged to find their own path and make the most of whatever opportunities caught their imaginations. That approach has served Davis particularly well—professionally and personally.

Davis believes that same independent, entrepreneurial mindset is what sets AICC members apart, equipping them well for whatever they will face in 2024 and the years beyond. He is honored and excited to lead the membership on behalf of the industry and the future of AICC. *BoxScore* sat down with Davis to learn more about his background, his journey through the industry, and his perspective on AICC and its future.

**BoxScore:** *Tell us a little bit about your family background and where you grew up.*

**Matt Davis:** My parents met in first grade, but we always joke that they didn't start dating till *second* grade. My parents, Jim and Jane, actually started dating after college. My mom came out to Denver, (Colorado,) from Iowa for school, and my dad eventually followed her out after college, and they got married. They were both schoolteachers in Denver, and then they started a family. I have an older brother, Pete, who is the general manager at DeLine Box, and a younger brother, Tom, who is a partner at Brown Brothers Harriman. Even though my brothers and I grew up in Denver, we have always identified as having Midwestern, Iowa roots.

# PACKAGING



From left: Jim Davis, Matt Davis, Mike D'Angelo, and Andrew Bell.

**BoxScore:** *What did you plan on doing for a career after high school?*

**Davis:** Back then, I'd probably have said that I wanted to be a ski instructor! But I actually ended up getting a business marketing degree at Creighton University in Omaha, (Nebraska).

After graduation, I went to Quito, Ecuador, where I volunteered teaching school for a year in a program sponsored by the Center for Working Families. We were teaching general subjects to inner-city street kids—kids who worked on the streets, shining shoes. The thought was that education is the best weapon against poverty; we didn't want to see these shoeshine kids grow up to be shoeshine men, if you will. The school provided a basic elementary education. Then, when the children were of high school age, Ecuadorian professionals taught things like how to be an auto mechanic, a carpenter, a baker, a plumber, and so on. As an American volunteer, in addition to teaching, our main role was giving these kids love and attention that they may not have been getting at home. The

**“Our independence gives us the freedom to serve customers in ways others can't, finding ways to say yes rather than no, empowering our employees and coworkers with the tools they need, and building on our natural sense of urgency and flexibility.”**

model works; many of these families have broken the cycle of poverty, and the Center for Working Families is still flourishing today.

**BoxScore:** *What was your first exposure to the industry?*

**Davis:** I'm third generation in the box business, so I grew up in the industry.

My mother's father, T.J. McLaughlin, was in the box business in the late 1930s through the 1960s and ended up being a part of three corrugated

box plants. He and John Ewers started Waterloo Corrugated Box Co. in 1938. In 1940, they purchased a corrugator and established a separate company, Waterloo Container Corp. In 1941, they partnered with John Worley and started Fort Dodge Container Corp., 100 miles west of Waterloo. Later, they partnered with Harold White to start White Container, in Monticello, Iowa.

My grandfather was truly innovative. Although the birth of the sheet feeder in the corrugated industry is not generally



Pressroom at Packaging Express.

recognized until the mid-1960s, the fact is that Waterloo Container Corp. was serving three sheet-plant operations in the early 1940s. That demonstrates how forward-thinking he was. The legacy that he created is part of what still motivates me today.

**BoxScore:** *How did your father get involved in the business?*

**Davis:** Even though my parents were teachers, my dad wasn't sure that was the best fit for him. He talked to his father-in-law, T.J. McLaughlin, about the box business, and my grandfather encouraged him to get in.

It's interesting, though, that my dad really never worked for his father-in-law, apart from sweeping the shop floor one summer when he was in high school. The story goes that there was a well-known paper company called Hoerner Waldorf that had a plant in Denver, and my grandfather got my dad a "warm introduction" there. My dad started there and worked his way up to become the sales manager. Eventually, he took over running the Denver plant.

After Hoerner Waldorf got sold, my dad had the opportunity to buy into another family-owned company in Denver, the DeLine Box Co. The Davis family and DeLine family have always been close, and DeLine Box is still thriving today under the leadership of

Dave DeLine, a fourth-generation owner. I cannot say enough good things about the DeLine family and the relationship we have with their business.

**BoxScore:** *It sounds like you could have been a ski instructor or a teacher. What led you to join your father in the box business?*

**Davis:** My brothers and I were always encouraged to do whatever we wanted to from a work standpoint. In college, I realized how much I admired my dad and what he did. My grandfather had success in the industry, and my mom's brother, Jack McLaughlin, was in the box business

in Cincinnati. My uncle, Ray Ryden, was high up in Boise Cascade and also had a lot of success. So, I knew it was a good industry. And once I realized that ski instructors didn't make a lot of money, I said, "You know, that box business looks pretty good!"

Before I went to Ecuador, we all sat around the breakfast table as a family, and my dad announced that he wanted to start a sheet plant in Colorado Springs to help service the southern Colorado market. He asked me and my brothers who was interested. It ended up being the best fit for me at that time. I told him that after my year of teaching, I was all in. In 1998, my father and I started Packaging Express.

After I'd been in the business maybe seven or eight years, my dad saw that I was serious and committed for the long term. So with the help of an accountant and a lawyer, they drew up papers for me to buy into the business. I bought 10% a year for five years, which ended up making us equal partners. When my mother passed away unexpectedly in 2009, my dad became less interested in the business. Shortly thereafter, I bought the rest of



Matt Davis on the floor at Packaging Express.



the business, and my dad has been able to focus on other things. He's heavily involved in the Catholic Church, where he volunteers and serves on a number of different boards. He's no longer involved in the company—other than moral support, which means a lot.

Twenty-five years later, I'm still here. Other than my year teaching, it's the only job I've ever had.

**BoxScore:** *What is the business focus at Packaging Express?*

**Davis:** Our focus is corrugated—boxes, displays, retail packaging, and so on. Early on, we were established as a complementary company to the DeLine Box Co. That's still largely true today. We are separate companies but complementary in that we do a lot of business back and forth and try not to duplicate anything between the two companies.

**BoxScore:** *Tell us a bit about your own family.*

**Davis:** I met my wife, Maggie, during my year in Ecuador. Maggie is from Chicago, and she was teaching in the same program. In Ecuador, we were just friends. After the program ended, we went back to our hometowns. I came back to Colorado and started Packaging Express with my father; she was teaching school, first in Chicago and then on the Upper West Side in New York City. We reconnected at a fundraiser for the school we had taught at in Quito and then dated long-distance between Colorado Springs and New York City. Eventually, I convinced her to come out here, and we got married. Today, we have two young girls, Catherine (10 years old) and Mary Elizabeth (7 years old).

**BoxScore:** *What led to your involvement in AICC?*

**Davis:** Growing up, we'd been traveling as a family to the AICC meetings for



Matt Davis and Mike D'Angelo inspect the die storage system at Packaging Express.

as long as I can remember. Some of our best vacations as children were tied to an AICC event.

Even beyond that, though, our family has always had close connections with the Association. My father's partner at DeLine Box, Jim DeLine, was AICC president, which is what they used to call the chairman, in 1988–1989. And then my father, Jim, was president in 1999–2000.

I've personally been active in the organization for a good portion of my career. I was a regional director, then I was in charge of convention content for six years. I've been on the board for 14 years.

We continue to see the value of AICC at Packaging Express. All of us are somewhat limited by our four walls. If we didn't get out and see what else is

happening, connect with our colleagues in the industry, we wouldn't be the company we are today. That's possible because of AICC.

**BoxScore:** *What are some of the key challenges facing the industry at this point that AICC may be able to speak to?*

**Davis:** The biggest challenges that a lot of businesses are facing right now involve people—hiring, training, retention, and motivation. As an industry, we make great products, and we should be proud of the work we do. But we can also be proud of the fact that we provide good jobs that people need. Our big challenge as an industry is getting the right people in the right positions and then inspiring them to deliver their best.

Workforce education naturally follows. It's hard to invest in education if you



Packaging Express graciously hosted the AICC Emerging Leaders field trip in June.

**“My biggest hope regarding the future of the industry is that as we reshape, rethink, and reinvent what we are doing in our efforts to continually improve and grow, we never lose the entrepreneurial spirit that brought us to where we are now.”**

don't think your new hires are going to stick around. That's why it's important to create an atmosphere that encourages them to stay and trains them for growth. The more they know about how you and your business are successful, the better off you're going to be. In other words, we need to gain, train, retain, and reward.

We also need to keep an eye on the economy. A lot of box plants had a lot of success during COVID-19. Although business is not as robust at this point, it is still very good. Of course, we can't control the economy. But we can work to create our own luck during those times when business may be slowing down. We need to be willing to think creatively and go after the business we want, every day.

**BoxScore:** *What are you most excited about when it comes to AICC's future?*

**Davis:** There are real advantages to being independent in this industry, and I'm excited about the ways we can accentuate those advantages. The theme for my year is what I call the "Independent Advantage."

Our independence gives us the freedom to serve customers in ways others can't, finding ways to say yes rather than no, empowering our employees and coworkers with the tools they need, and building on our natural sense of urgency and flexibility.

One of the biggest benefits of being involved with AICC is that you get to learn from so many talented and successful people in your own industry. People are willing to share their ideas, open their plants and show you how they do things, and help you be successful. I'm

excited about participating in that to a greater degree and promoting that within the organization.

**BoxScore:** *What would be your biggest hope regarding the future of the industry?*

**Davis:** My biggest hope regarding the future of the industry is that as we reshape, rethink, and reinvent what we are doing in our efforts to continually improve and grow, we never lose the entrepreneurial spirit that brought us to where we are now. I hope we never forget the importance of the human relationships that are so much a part of the AICC family and the businesses we run.

**BoxScore:** *Looking back, do you ever have days when you wish you'd become a ski instructor?*

**Davis:** [Laughter] I love what I do. I just feel incredibly blessed that I've been able to work in this industry and build this business with my father. Not everyone gets that opportunity. I'm glad to be right where I am. ■



**Bittner** is a Michigan-based freelance journalist and a frequent BoxScore contributor.