

ENTREPRENEUR THAT GIVES A DAMN



Fighting the good fight runs in the family for Wes Carter

WORDS BY MARY KATE MCGOWAN

WHO

Getting into good trouble runs in the family for Wes Carter. In the 1950s, his grandfather, W. Horace Carter, faced down the Ku Klux Klan as a newspaper editor in Tabor City, North Carolina, using his editorial authority to protest the Klan's activities. The fight culminated in the paper winning the 1953 Pulitzer Prize for Meritorious Public Service and aiding the arrest and conviction of nearly 100 Klansmen.

Fast-forward seventy years later, and grandson Wes Carter is fighting for climate action and awareness.

The two men share family ties and the family business—seventy-five-year-old Atlantic Packaging, the largest privately owned packaging company in North America with headquarters in Wilmington, North Carolina.

Following in his grandfather's and father's footsteps, Wes Carter, 44, has taken the helm of Atlantic Packaging and continues his family's entrepreneurial spirit by steering the company in a new direction: into the fight to increase sustainable packaging to save our rivers, lakes, and oceans from plastic pollution.

"Since the early 1990s, we've built our reputation on being a highly technical packaging company, working with major consumer products, companies, and retail brands," said Carter, adding that he wanted to do more, just like his grandfather did.

An active sportsman, Carter travels around the world to surf. A few years ago, during his travels, Carter kept noticing plastic packaging floating in the water. While the plastic relics were not from Atlantic Packaging, the trash came from the global supply chain, where Atlantic Packaging is an active participant.

"On some level, I felt like I had my grandfather tapping me on the shoulder. I had the realization that we had a seat at the table with the largest consumer product companies in the world who already look to us for all their packaging problems," he said.

Carter understood that Atlantic Packaging is in a unique position to embrace sustainable packaging and to advocate for brands to adopt best practices and make a difference.

"The company was founded during the era of civil rights, fighting for equality. And in the era of climate change and plastic pollution, we're the same organization fighting for environmental rights," Carter said. "Maybe this is what our organization was always supposed to do."



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WHAT

To amplify Atlantic Packaging's voice at the table, Carter founded and launched A New Earth Project (ANEP). The Atlantic Packaging initiative is composed of a coalition of outdoor enthusiasts, brands, and packaging suppliers focused on creating, scaling, and advocating for sustainable packaging solutions to help eliminate plastic pollution from the world's waterways.

Through ANEP, Carter has helped brands overcome packaging challenges, has launched a documentary series to educate the masses on the plastic waste crisis, and has helped Atlantic Packaging become the first packaging company to join The Conservation Alliance. The initiative has also developed standards for local communities to protect their beaches more effectively and has advocated for vital environmental policies, such as bottle return bills and extended producer responsibility.

"We are just trying to be a vehicle to raise awareness and create solutions," he said.

To start strong, Carter focused ANEP's initial efforts on helping the outdoor industry adopt and lead the sustainable packaging movement. From Patagonia's founder Yvon

Chouinard's sustainability advocacy to REI's Leave No Trace principles, the outdoor industry has a history of pushing sustainability forward. Through ANEP, Carter partnered with well-known surfers to share their stories about the rise of ocean pollution and team up to tackle the crisis by offering sustainable packaging solutions and a catalog of New Earth Approved packaging products.

"We did a documentary series last year called "Journey to a New Earth," where we documented surfboard packaging, which traditionally was tons of single-use plastic, not recyclable, packaging. Surfboard packaging was as bad as it gets," said Carter.

ANEP has already seen results and created a sustainable packaging system for surfboards.

"It's now been adopted by many of the major surfboard manufacturers, and we believe by the end of this year, we will be the dominant packaging system for surfboards," said Carter.

ANEP is working on expanding its reach with more partnerships in the outdoor industry as well as staying engaged with Atlantic Packaging's larger clients, including Procter and Gamble.

"They are paying attention, and they think what we're doing is amazing," he said.



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WHY

For Carter, carrying on his family's legacy means more than looking to the past and his grandfather for inspiration. Carter is also motivated by his hope for future generations, including his twin 8-year-olds, and by the responsibility he feels to leave Planet Earth in better shape than he found it.

And a way to help make that change is by helping create a sustainable supply chain. He said that creating a healthier supply chain means having healthier humans and a healthier planet. From the oceans to the jungles to the air, adopting sustainable practices, packaging, and beyond, can have a significant impact.

"It's our responsibility as the most intelligent beings on this planet to support healthy living, and that's what I hope A New Earth Project can be a part of as a catalyst and hopefully inspire other organizations to do the same kinds of things. Because we can't do it alone," Carter said.

To learn more about A New Earth Project, visit anewearthproject.com GG