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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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SPE NAMES DONALD (DON) HYLTON THERMOFORMER OF THE YEAR

DANBURY. CT U.S.A., December 9, 2024: The Society of Plastics Engineers (SPE) Thermoforming Division has named Donald (Don) Hylton Thermoformer of the Year.

The award will be presented during SPE's Thermoforming Awards Dinner, held in conjunction with the 30th SPE Thermoforming Conference®. ***The conference will take place May 19-21, 2025 in Atlanta, GA,*** at Cobb Galleria Centre and the Renaissance Atlanta Waverly Hotel. The Awards Dinner will be held on Tuesday, May 20, at the Hotel.

Don received his BS in chemistry and biology from Kentucky State University and pursued graduate studies in physical chemistry at the University of Louisville. Don began his career in GE's Plastics Application Center. He was tasked with developing test procedures on a new commercial instrument called a Rheometrics Mechanical Spectrometer (now part of TA Instruments). Don developed the first dynamic mechanical thermal analysis (DMTA) test on this instrument which is now a standard ASTM test method: D7028.

GE developed a program to replace metal refrigerator liners with a thermoformed plastic liner. The new inflation instrument Don developed showed the differences in the materials, reducing the need to conduct expensive and time-consuming trials. The test proved useful in other thermoforming applications and blow molding. GE's trade secret was eventually published in the *Journal of Polymer Engineering and Science* in 1980 and was later revered by *Chemical Week* magazine as the most significant contribution of the year.

In 1980, Don joined ExxonMobil's Polymers Division and received two assignments: 1) to determine the cause of premature failure of a fiber-grade polypropylene. 2) to develop a thermoformable grade of polypropylene. Polypropylene was not used in thermoforming at the time.

Don's experience with GE's ABS liner program became useful for this effort. Don quantified the viscoelastic properties a material needed to be successfully and consistently thermoformed.

The task was to create these same properties with PP. The product became known as “High Melt Strength (HMS PP), a term used today to describe thermoformable PP. Several commercial trials were conducted with the new melt phase forming PP. This was the first time PP was thermoformed on conventional vacuum forming equipment.

Don was also a pioneer in the development of co-extruded multilayer food packaging in collaboration with Campbell Soup, Hormel, and Ball Plastics. These were the first thermoformed shelf-stable plastic food packages commonly seen today. He also worked with Millikin Company to develop the first clear PP for food packaging. Today it is known as clarified PP.

Don attended one of Bill McConnell’s thermoforming workshops and met Stan Rosen, Charlie Hovesapien, Jim Throne, John Griep, and numerous other thermoforming pioneers. They encouraged Don to join the SPE Thermoforming Division and become a member of its board of directors. Bill soon invited Don to present at his next workshop- an invitation that led to Don’s employment with McConnell Company to this day.

In 1995, Don joined Clark Atlanta University as Associate Director of the New Science and Technology Center where he conducted research and pursued new ways of characterizing materials for thermoforming. He also mentored students and influenced their decisions to pursue careers in plastics. Over the years, Don has advised more than 20 PhD chemistry and chemical engineering students at Clark Atlanta, University of Louisville, and Georgia Tech.

At Clark Atlanta, Don developed a new technology and testing equipment for evaluating materials for thermoformability called the Thermoforming Index. Don was able to isolate critical material properties that give a material its “melt strength.” This technology has been used to solve many material-related problems in thermoforming production and is used as a quality control tool.

A member of the Society of Plastics Engineers since 1985, Don was named an Emeritus Member in 2018, and in 1997, one of just three thermoforming Fellows of the Society. An active SPE Thermoforming Division Board Member, Don served as the Division’s ANTEC Technical Program Chair from 2000-2010 and was the first chair of the Division’s Student Affairs Scholarship Program. Don was presented with the Division’s Outstanding Achievement Award in 2000 and its Lifetime Achievement Award in 2014 when he was also named an Emeritus Member of the Division. Don also served as ASTM Plastics Sheeting and Films Subcommittee Chair and reviewed and updated all ASTM standards and test methods for sheeting and films. Don received the ASTM Outstanding Achievement Award for his work in sheeting and films. He is the author of numerous technical papers and the book, *Understanding Plastics Testing*.

“Each of Don Hylton’s achievements is more impressive than the last,” said Paul Uphaus, SPE Thermoforming Division Chair. “The SPE Thermoforming Division Board is honored to name Don Hylton as the 2025 SPE Thermoformer of the Year.”

Past recipients of the Thermoformer of the Year Award may be found on the SPE Thermoforming Division website at <https://thermoformingdivision.com/awards-recognitions/thermoformer-of-the-year/past-winners/>.

More information is available at <https://thermoformingdivision.com> or by contacting Megan Uphaus at 1 (317) 694-4657 or muphaus@thermoformingdivision.com

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THE SPE THERMOFORMING DIVISION is a technical division of the Society of Plastics Engineers, based in Danbury, CT. The Thermoforming Division's mission is to facilitate the advancement of thermoforming technologies through education, application, promotion and research. The Division hosts an annual educational conference and publishes an award-winning technical journal, *SPE Thermoforming Quarterly*®. The Division has also funded over \$275K in equipment grants and tens of thousands of dollars in undergraduate scholarships since it was first formed. For more information, please visit <https://thermoformingdivision.com>.