



PREMIER MANUFACTURING INTRODUCES 1839 AND WILDHORSE 1-OUNCE PIPE

# Tobacco Business

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RYO UPDATE:

Steady as She

# ROLLS

The RYO ship is a sure and steady one these days. Read about 10 trends that are shaping the state of the industry.

## ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

Electric Alley: Making the Most of Vape Products

Cigar Sense: Grow Your Events

Takeaways From Vapor Expo International



## Miami Cigar Sponsors Fantasy Camp Kickoff

The Florida company helped kick off the Fifth Annual Dwyane Wade Fantasy Camp event.

Miami Cigar & Company recently served as the official cigar partner of the Dwyane Wade Fantasy Camp Draft Party at the Westin Diplomat Hotel & Resort in Hollywood, Florida. Three-time NBA Champion Dwyane Wade kicked off the Fifth Annual Dwyane Wade Fantasy Camp with the exclusive party for 100 lucky guests. Attendees were treated to music, appetizers, cocktails and Nestor Miranda Collection cigars.

Jason Wood, vice president of Miami Cigar & Company, was on hand to personally present Dwyane Wade with an exclusive Hfbarcelona Miami-Heat-themed humididor filled with Nestor Miranda Collection and La Aurora Preferido cigars.

"We are truly honored to have had the opportunity to take part in Dwyane Wade's Fantasy Camp," said Wood. "We are always excited to give back to the community and spread that #OneLife mentality whenever possible."



## Halo Releases E-Liquid Test Results

Recognizing that consumers are concerned about the contents of the e-liquids they vape, Halo has decided to post the results of its product testing publicly. The company's quality control process includes extensive testing for a range of inhalation hazards—diacetyl and acetyl propionyl included, explains a spokesperson, who says that all e-liquids are blended by trained chemists in a clean-room environment in Gainesville, Florida.

"Before we ever even mix a flavor into our base e-liquid, it is sent out for testing via gas chromatography and mass spectrometry," she says. "This assures us that our flavorings do not include either diacetyl or acetyl propionyl. We don't even allow our own employees to test an e-liquid until it comes back from the labs 'clean.' And if we're not going to risk it, we sure don't want you to either."

## HIGHLIGHTS

### Atlantic Airlines Obtains Cuba and Caribbean Sea Authorization

The Federal Aviation Administration has authorized Atlantic Airlines to conduct flights to Cuba, says Mark Blanton, president of Atlantic Airlines. "I'm in the process of working with the Cuban consulate to find out about fees and the required licenses," he says. "Once I get those in place I will hire personnel and we'll begin flying routes twice a day from Tampa, Orlando and Lakeland [Florida]."

As Blanton understands it, Americans who travel to Cuba will need to be doing so at least in part to participate in an educational purpose. Among other topics, he hopes to organize trips for visitors interested in learning about the country's cigar-manufacturing industry.



# Humming Along at THE HUMIDOR STORE

By Jennifer Gelfand

Once a cabinet-manufacturing company, this family-owned and -operated business now makes customized humidors for retailers around the globe.

Mark Blanton



**W**hen Mark Blanton of The Humidor Store describes the business his family started back in 1968 he can't help but marvel at its evolution over the years. The biggest change came about in 1993 when a customer approached the Blantons about building a humidor for him. "We said, 'What's a humidor?'" recalls Blanton. "Well, we made a lot of jewelry boxes in the beginning, but once we learned about it we started making tabletop humidors."

Over the years both the business and its products grew bigger and bigger. The company went from a builder of custom cabinets with a sideline in personal humidors to a builder of commercial walk-in and full-store humidors.

But what makes The Humidor Store

most unique is the company's approach to its craft, explains Blanton, who has since learned pretty much everything there is to know about cigar storage during the past two decades. "People would call asking about how to build a humidor in their stores and I would explain it over the phone or sometimes even go to the site," he says. "Dad finally said, 'Why don't we just build them a portable walk-in humidor?'"

## THE ADVANTAGES OF MODULAR

The result was a modular "Lego-like" system that can be built to order at the company's headquarters in Tampa, Florida and shipped anywhere in the world. Customers can custom order to the exact specifications of their store, then expand the humidor by ordering extra pieces down the line. "You lose



A finished walk-in humidor that The Humidor Store made for Huntsville, Alabama-based Vintage Wine & Cigars



Jim Blanton designs a freestanding humidor for a major grocery store chain.



Sally Blanton and Bobby Lauver verify that arriving raw materials meet the company's high quality standards.

nothing of your initial value when you decide to make it larger or to move to a new location,” explains Blanton, who has built humidors for far-flung locations like London and Vietnam.

There’s also a cost-saving component to embracing the modular concept in that it generally requires no building, electrical or plumbing permits. “It’s freestanding and plugs right into the wall; you just run a simple 1/4-inch water line to the humidor to provide water,” explains Blanton. “It’s evolved to the point where people lease a space and

call us up and say, ‘Make me a store.’ We design everything: where the safe and the cash counter will go, whether they want Internet cameras or automatic doors, what kind of humidor they want, what kind of lounge—a massive project.”

In some cases, customers simply want the commercial humidification system itself, so The Humidor Store has started selling those as well. Today, humidification modules are a thriving business on their own, says Blanton. “We have more than 9,000 of one of our models out there right now.”

About 50 percent of The Humidor Store’s customers contact the company looking to outfit a new shop, while the remainder are hoping to upgrade or add an in-store humidor to an existing shop.

According to Blanton, many retailers who call do so after experiencing problems with systems they installed on their own. In particular, retailers are frustrated when minerals from the humidification system settle on the cellophane wrappers covering the cigars and make them less appealing to customers. “We get a lot of questions about the water supplies



Rick McKenrick adjusts the glass door on a small freestanding humidor that is getting ready to be shipped to a liquor store.



Luis Rodríguez makes last-minute preparations prior to staining the door frame for a humidor coming down the factory line.

where retailers are finding that the mist is landing, turning the cigar cellophane wrappers a gray color and making everything look dull and dingy," he explains. "We explain that the water needs to be cleaned through a process so that it is pristine and you don't get any of that film on the product. Then we tell them to talk to retailers and to go see the finished product in action. After that, we usually get a phone call asking, 'Where do we begin?'"

### HOW IT WORKS

Projects begin with a conversation. That stage can go quickly or can take months depending on how much back-and-forthing goes on. For example, if a store owner calls to express interest in upgrading his existing humidor, Blanton will ask for the dimensions

of the store and what he has in mind. Is there something that the owner has seen in a magazine or in another shop that he liked? "We start with a blank sheet of paper because no two stores—and no two store owners—are the same," says Blanton.

Next, The Humidor Store sends design sketches to the client. Some retailers request minimal changes, others ask for more. When the design is complete, the company runs color sketches depicting the humidor from multiple angles past the customer. "Then we spray wood samples from the various woods and stains we offer and send them for the customer to share with his/her employees and partners and get back to us with feedback," says Blanton. "After that we build one or two cabinets that

they can come to see in person to make sure we have the color exactly right."

Finally, The Humidor Store erects the entire store within its factory, checks to make sure everything is working right and takes photos. "Then we disassemble it, wrap everything up and put it on our own trucks," states Blanton. "We have a family member drive it there and, if required, we send installers up to unpack it and set it up."

The price of a commercial walk-in humidor design, build and install can run from as little as \$13,000 to as high as \$450,000. "It depends on how elaborate and fancy you want everything to be," says Blanton, who notes that the company is up to any challenge. "Our approach is, 'If you can dream it, we can build it.'" **TBI**