

# From humble beginnings to a worldwide brand

## Family business values remain the same with Rob Sands at the helm

By **BEN JACOBS**

Rob Sands had big shoes to fill when he took over as president and CEO of Constellation Brands in 2007. His father, Marvin Sands, and brother, Richard Sands, had already built the company into the largest wine company in the world.

That success has not slowed at all, as Constellation reached \$7.3 billion in sales this year and employs nearly 9,000 people worldwide.

“We’ve come a long way from our humble beginnings in 1945 as a small wine producer in upstate New York,” Rob Sands says. “What excites me most about the future of our company is reaching more consumers, creating more jobs, supporting more communities, and driving leading industry growth.”

Constellation has relentlessly acquired brands worldwide in an effort to stay ahead of its competition and provide options across the alcohol categories—wine, beer and spirits.

“It starts with our consumers,” Rob Sands says. “We understand our consumers and strive, not only to meet their current drinking preferences, but also to anticipate and respond to what they’ll be reaching for next.”

“We have the high-performing brands across all three categories and can deliver on what consumers are looking for.”

Rob Sands’ Rochester Business Hall of Fame induction continues a family trend. Marvin Sands and Richard Sands were members of the first induction class in 2001.

“It means a lot to me to be able to join my father and brother in the Business Hall of Fame,” Rob Sands says. “I think it’s a nice affirmation of our long-standing community involvement, our work through the Sands Family Foundation and Constellation Brands, as well as my work through the chamber.

“We are committed to our roots in this community.”



Rob Sands, middle, and Constellation Brands employees at Obregon Brewery in Mexico this year.

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Rob Sands has been interested in more than just following in his father’s footsteps as a successful businessman. He also strives to continue his father’s philanthropic spirit. Last year, the Sands Family Foundation donated \$61 million to the Rochester Area Community Foundation.

“Our family feels fortunate to be able to give back to the community where we live and conduct business,” Rob Sands says. “When it comes to our family’s legacy, what matters the most is that we’ve honored the founding principles my father set from the very beginning, most importantly, giving back to our community.”

In addition to donating money, Rob Sands also donates his time and expertise. He is chairman of the board of the New York Wine and Culinary Center and the Greater Rochester Chamber of Commerce.

Rob Sands didn’t join the family business straight out of school. After earning his law degree and J.D. from Pace University School of Law in 1984, he began his career as an associate with Harter Secrest & Emery in Rochester. He joined Constellation—then Canandaigua Wine Co. Inc. — in 1986 as general counsel

overseeing legal affairs.

“When I started at Constellation, I was in a newly created role as in-house counsel. My job was to focus on the legal aspects of growing the company and bring many of the skills I gained to our growing family business and help launch us to our next level of success,” Rob Sands says. “Mostly, I think the rigor of the law practice was great preparation for meeting the demands of leading a growing Fortune 500 company.”

Rob Sands worked his way through the ranks as Canandaigua Wine Co. Inc. became Canandaigua Brands Inc. in 1997 and then Constellation Brands Inc. in 2000. He became executive vice president and general counsel in 1993, then chief executive officer of Constellation International in 1998.

Throughout all of the growth under his leadership, Rob Sands has prized his employees for their dedication to their work and their community.

“Our company has many successes, but none of them would be possible without our people,” he says. “They are an example to me and to this community because of their



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“We’ve come a long way from our humble beginnings in 1945 as a small wine producer in upstate New York,” says Rob Sands, president and CEO of Constellation Brands.

unending capacity and commitment to reflect and honor our family business values both at work and in the communities where we live and operate.

“People are our most valuable assets and people are one of our core values.”

*Ben Jacobs is the editor of the Rochester Business Journal.*