

GREAT GRIZZLY TIMES

A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT, RICHARD B. SHIELDS



2022 - FIREWORKS ISSUES IN MAINLAND CHINA

Normally I let my staff tell you about events in the fireworks business and/or things happening with our new products and brands. I'm going to use this newsletter to talk about changes in China and our supply chain.

We all are aware of what happened to goods coming from China during the first couple of years of Covid. Production was not guaranteed, as just recently there was a closure in China over an uptick in Covid cases in Hunan province. This could happen again and again.

Our suppliers have talked of chemical shortages, price increases, and demands within the Chinese domestic markets that have and will continue to affect our supply. Factories are making access to smaller, less expensive fireworks products increasingly difficult to get a reliable supply. Local demand for these items are at an all-time high. Inflation worldwide is likely to keep prices ticking up for the unforeseeable future. RMB exchange rates have been unpredictable as well.

Even though ocean freight rates have started to decline it wasn't soon enough to allow us to reduce prices, as 90% of the inventory required for next season was already shipped. Delivery delays have eased, and we recently avoided a rail strike which would have likely affected most import industries. We have seen new factories in China which seemingly have modernized some product lines. Mostly this was done for high-volume products and things like labeling etc... More improvements will be needed to keep generic and laborious small-unit products from continuing to overly increase in price. Labor costs are just too high to produce these items efficiently at the moment.

On the home front, we have continued to make changes to add space to our Forest Park, Georgia facility and by the time you receive this newsletter, we will have acquired two additional new warehouse locations in Muncie, Indiana.

First is a location at 1302 E. Washington Street, just two blocks away from our home office. Previously it was a machine shop and tool & die company, having been unoccupied and sold several times on tax sales in the last 15 years. It was partially demolished and quite overgrown. We were approached by the East Central Indiana (ECI) Economic Development Corporation. Their goal is to put blighted and unused properties back on the tax rolls. They offered it in 2021 on an RFP. Subsequently, we offered a rehab proposal, and it was accepted. We have closed and rehabbed the primary building taking it from an extremely ugly duckling to a new vibrant looking functional warehouse. This site is over 3 acres, and the warehouse is almost 25,000 sq. ft. It was quite a project, but it will be completed by the time you get this publication. It may even be the location of one of our future demos.

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NEW FOR 2023!



STEVEN IRVIN

We have a LOT of inventory going into the 2023 season and could have gone without any new items for a year, but there were too many new, unique, or value-items that we just could not pass up! We will be introducing at least 20 new items between Great Grizzly, Fire Factory, Chain Link, and our other suppliers.

We will be adding a new 360G Chain Link assorted case which will bring that line up to 6 items and 30 unique cakes total. We have gotten a great response from the Chain Link linkable cakes and will continue to expand on the already endless combinations of ways to build a show with only one fuse to light. We also now have posters and pop-up signs to help explain these new cakes to your customers.

Girandolas were new for 2022 and are now becoming more intricate and spectacular. Last season's Alien Assault is a great performance with 22 shots of swimming stars to a UFO finale. This year's new addition, High Limit 21 Shot, will feature one of the coolest girandolas ever seen in a consumer firework!



HIGH LIMIT



BOMB PARTY PACK

With the success of Tiki Bombs over the past several years, we wanted to bring you the same amazing tails to a new set of 200g cakes. Our new Bomb Party Pack features Tiger Bomb w/ Tiger Tails, Crackling Bomb w/ Crackling Tails, and Glitter Bomb w/ Glittering tails. These cakes come in a display tray and can be sold as a 3-pack or individual cakes.

NEW WEBSITE

We have been working hard for over a year now to update our business software and website to allow online ordering. Our new site allows you to sign in to see current stock, see pricing, select out-of-stock items to be notified when they are back in stock, place your orders online, and much more. In the coming months' everyone will receive an email with UN, PW, and instructions but if you would like to start using the new site now, please contact your sales rep for access.

Steven Irvin
Director of Operations

A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1...

Lastly, last March 2022 we purchased the Muncie Power Products headquarters and warehouse at 400 N. Hackley & 342 N. Pershing, Muncie. The previous owners are relocating the operation to another site. It is less than 10 blocks from our other acquisition. We will take possession of this site in late spring of 2023. This location will add another 50,000+ sq. ft. and additional dock space. It is in excellent condition and will give us immediate warehousing space which should complete our needed expansion of NCI facilities in Muncie.

As you can see 2022 has been an exciting year. NCI will continue to offer more brands and product offerings in the coming months. As I said, "Change is Inevitable", successful companies do it sooner!

Best wishes for a prosperous 2023 season.
All the best....



Richard B. Shields
President/NCI

COBRA-CON 2023

NCI is proud to be a primary sponsor for the upcoming Cobra Con Convention being hosted in our backyard of Muncie Indiana. The convention dates are May 11th - May 14th and is being held at the Horizon Event Center in downtown Muncie. Cobra Con is the annual hands-on conference for all things Cobra firing systems. From beginner crash courses all the way up to in-depth expert scripting, Cobra Con offers something for every skill level. NCI will have a featured booth in the 4-day tradeshow alongside some of the industry's top suppliers for all things pyro. In addition, NCI has partnered with Cobra to sponsor their increasingly popular Pyro Boot Camp. Boot Camp will feature 15 teams of pyrotechnicians that design and script a mini pyro show set to music. All 15 teams will feature a healthy complement of Great Grizzly and Fire Factory products. Their shows will be shot competition style on Saturday night with the winners announced at the conclusion! To learn more about Cobra Con, NCI's partnership with Cobra, or amazing shows featured throughout the week, visit www.cobra-con.com. We hope to see you there!



THURSDAY, MAY 11TH – SUNDAY, MAY 14TH
MUNCIE, INDIANA, US



COBRA-CON.COM

BOOM BABY!



KURT COWGILL

Hello and Happy New Year to all of our fellow pyros. Another year down and we are happy to say it was a good one overall. The consumer industry as a whole is coming down from a few banner years with most still landing at significantly higher sales dollars than they achieved pre-pandemic. Domestic inventory levels are stabilized and although new production is still uncertain, the likelihood of a mass shortage for the 2023 season is very low. Planning ahead and getting high fulfillment rates on early orders are now a reality again, and you'll also find some items available that you haven't seen on a wholesale stock list or retail shelf since the 2020 season. Items like Jumping Jacks, Sparklers, Saturn Missiles, Roman Candles, and tube firecrackers are suddenly in stock but are moving out fairly quickly as customers realize they are in. With a healthy supply of fireworks available, retailers will be able to return to the marketing campaigns, or just down-and-dirty dealing that many consumers came to expect pre-pandemic. One lesson many have learned and adapted to in recent years is that placing orders well in advance increases the chances of getting what you want, and on a timeline that won't require the

last-minute scramble that can put unnecessary stress on everyone involved. Those that have shifted the timetable on their orders to earlier than normal have seen a tremendous improvement in efficiency and the ability to plan ahead to have smooth selling seasons.

On another note, at the time of this writing, my wife Allyson and I are anxiously awaiting the arrival of our firstborn son. It's likely that by the time you are reading this, baby Rhett will be born and I'll be juggling parenthood and fireworks with a tiny window of sleep in between. We've been so thankful for all of the support and well wishes we have received and are very excited to meet our little man. I'll certainly do the best I can to make sure he has an eye for good fireworks and a strong work ethic like Dad. We'll certainly make arrangements to make sure all of my duties are covered while I am out during and immediately after his arrival, but wanted to inform everyone of this life event in case I am unreachable for a short period of time in January.



BABY RHETT

We're looking forward to a great summer season and feel the stars are aligning for a big one. Stay tuned for big improvements to your customer experience while shopping with NCI. Another thing to watch for is the rollout of our 2023 new items that will start in the Spring of 2023. We will uphold or exceed the standard of quality and innovation on these items that we have set previously. Until next time, stay lit!

KURT
Kurt Cowgill
Vice President



NFA AND APA FALL CONVENTIONS

The Fall NFA Convention returned to Kingsport, TN in September 2022. With convention attendance numbers slowly returning to normal, Kingsport would prove to be another great opportunity for the NCI team to showcase their hard work from the past year.

The tradeshow booth featured over 50 new items to display including additions to our top-selling Chain Link® brand fireworks. A second set of CL 500g cakes (24 shots) and a second set of CL 200g cakes (20 shots) are all linkable and interchangeable with any Chain Link® devices! Also in 2022, NCI brought back a fascinating device called a Girandola cake. Appropriately named Alien Assault, which features a howling, screeching, flying, wheel of doom. And another addition to our ever-growing and very popular mini lineup is Mini Taste the Rainbow 360g cake! This is the latest entry into our “great effects, now at an even better retail price”. Mini Taste the Rainbow features the great colors and performance of its big brother Taste the Rainbow 500g. It joins these other fantastic mini versions, Brocade Crown Waterfall Mini, Minor Infraction, and Jamaican Broccoli (also new in 2022).



AJ BURNS

As North Central Industries continues to grow and become a household brand in the fireworks industry, so too do our employees and the opportunities afforded to them. I was asked by the NFA Board to host a seminar based on my knowledge of the retail and wholesale sectors of our business. I invited seminar chairwoman Sabrina Nickels to co-host and offer insights into two of the fastest-growing companies in the industry. Keeping the seminar as a lighthearted open discussion forum, we fielded questions and offered our advice to promote industry best practices. Touching on topics such as social media advertising, retail pricing strategy, how to be more efficient when placing wholesale orders, and even the international shortage of Visco fuse. (Which NCI is proud to say we have PLENTY of! Item #1200 Cannon Fuse) The NFA member engagement and knowledge passed around the room was encouraging to say the least. The fireworks industry is one that strives to grow and seeks to improve, helping each other learn and prosper for the betterment of the industry. Thank you to the many contributors who helped make this seminar a success and even carried the conversation past our allotted time!

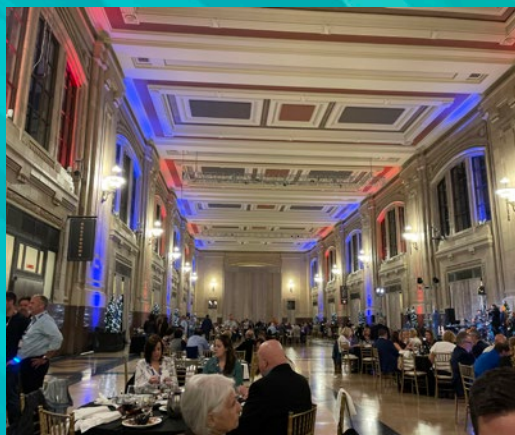
Another opportunity granted to NCI is the nomination and election of our very own Kurt Cowgill. Kurt was nominated to the NFA Treasurer position to fulfill a role held by the esteemed Bob Kellner. Mr. Kellner, after decades of service to the NFA, and the fireworks industry, has decided to retire from his role as treasurer. Kurt, having served for six years as the treasurer on the APSEF board, was more than happy to step into the role. With Kurt's extensive financial background and 15 years of industry experience, I know he will serve the NFA membership well. Congratulations Kurt!

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6...

2022 APA

To learn more about the NFA or the APSEF, please visit the websites below!

www.nationalfireworks.com
www.celebratesafely.org




2022 NFA



NFA AND APA FALL CONVENTIONS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5...

The APA Fall Conference was hosted in the beautiful Country Club Plaza District of Kansas City. The plaza offered a smorgasbord of restaurants and local shops that the membership patronized daily. As for this writer, Diebel's Sportsmen Gallery was a pleasant discovery. Diebel's, in business since 1954, features a large walk-in humidior and all the accessories a gentleman could desire. Ties and pocket squares, dress socks and fancy shaving accessories, books about aviation history, and dozens of hand-etched flasks just awaiting your finest bottle of bourbon.

Adding to the ambiance of Kansas City, our Wednesday evening dinner and fireworks extravaganza was held at Union Station. The 1.4 shows featured in this town square were some of the best uses of comet and mine-type devices I have ever seen. I highly recommend visiting the APA Facebook page to see the stunning pictures captured during this event. [facebook.com/americanpyro](https://www.facebook.com/americanpyro) 

On the business side of the APA Fall Conference, our NCI staff attended informative sessions throughout the week. An important update concerning the national rail system showed that the APA is dedicated and focused on improving the transportation pipeline concerning our hazardous goods shipments. With new alliances formed between the ports of Mobile and New Orleans, ports that previously had not allowed hazardous goods, fireworks importers continue to have options, now more than ever. In addition, the APA is diligently working with the Federal Maritime Commission to implement the Ocean Shipping Reform Act. This important congressional act will help control future fluctuations in shipping rates and help diminish the ability for freight liners to charge outlandish detention and demurrage fees.

Another important aspect of the convention is the AFSL membership meeting. NCI is a longtime member of the American Fireworks Safety Laboratory and values its contributions to the industry. AFSL is a necessary 3rd party testing agency that ensures our fireworks are safe and perform as they are intended. With the help of the current AFSL directors, items such as Chain Link could soon be approved by their rigorous testing standards. Perhaps equally important, AFSL has held a presence in the evolving Brazilian fireworks manufacturing market. With the desire of the industry to prevent future product shortages, agencies like the AFSL will help lead the charge in emerging markets.

An update on the American Pyrotechnics Safety and Education Foundation or APSEF for short. Kurt having served two terms as the treasurer of the foundation, termed out. This left an open seat on the executive committee which I am happy to report, I was nominated to fill. Having participated in the foundation meetings for two years and being elected to sit on the board last year, I am honored to have been called to serve on the executive committee as treasurer. An important funding initiative that the APSEF implemented in 2022 is a children's coloring book that features our resident scientist and safety expert, Professor Sparkz. The coloring books are intended for retailers to have something fun and engaging for their young customers all while promoting the safe and responsible use of fireworks. During our general session meetings, I was able to gain commitments from APA member companies for over 35,000 coloring books. These books will go directly to young future pyrotechnicians and enthusiasts to promote fireworks safety. If you'd like to help the APSEF reach its goal of 100,000 books, please call me!!



To close out the week of meetings and informative seminars, the NCI marketing team attended a session hosted by Pair'd Up! The owner and founder, Kalee Pair, offered valuable insight into social media marketing and how to maintain customer engagement and relevancy in a fast-paced social media-laden world. Be sure to look for new and exciting marketing campaigns coming to a social media platform near you! Or your grandkids, just ask them.



To learn more about the APA, or if you'd like to support the APSEF and order your very own custom coloring books, visit the websites below or scan the QR code! You can also email me directly at aj@greatgrizzly.com.

www.americanpyro.com
www.celebratesafely.org

AJ Burns
Area Sales Manager

RETURN TO “SOME” NORMALCY!



JEFF BRANDENBURG

I hope this newsletter finds you well!

Since this past Fourth of July, it seems to be returning to more of a normal fireworks cycle compared to that of the prior 3 years. It's clear that many buyers have more inventory on-hand at this time, and are ordering more specific items in certain categories than what we experienced in 2020 through the summer of 2022. Over those seasons, we were shipping at a steady pace all year long rather than more seasonal as in most prior seasons. This return, to what I would call a more normal cycle, has given us time to refocus on bringing you more of the innovative, high-quality, and unique products we're known for, and I am very happy to say that we have many of those "finally" back in stock! Want Tiki Bombs...we got 'em, want Super Stinger's...we got 'em. Did someone say Glitter Bomb, 2-Minute Warning, 100 Shot Super Finale? Well, we have those as well. You have asked if we have a lot of new items for 2023 already in stock. I'm glad to say, yes, we sure do! Our southern U.S. customers have already ordered several of these items in preparation for this past New Year's selling season. You'll want to be sure to get these early on as they are moving at a strong pace.


One of our newest and fastest growing categories is our very own, and very exclusive to NCI, "Chain Link Fireworks." You will only find these here. These are linkable 200-gram, 360-gram, and 500-gram cakes that all connect together. Link your desired cakes with each other, light one end, get back, and watch the show! These proprietary cakes can be mixed, with various sizes and varieties, to create your own unique show. Our Chain Links allow the average customer to build their very own show with ease. I encourage you to set yourself apart from the competition and make Chain Link a part of your offerings. Visit www.chainlinkfireworks.com for more details, photos, and a product demonstration. These are in stock and ready to ship.

At this time, we are seeing the needle moving back in the right direction as it relates to inventory supply and costs. Most shipping lanes have dropped pricing by a good margin since 2020, and that seems to be trending in this direction for the more immediate future. Although, we have seen certain items and the cost of raw materials increase in China. What does this mean for importer wholesale domestic pricing for the summer 2023 season? Well, you never know what can happen to set things off in the wrong direction in today's world, however, I do expect to see wholesale domestic pricing become more competitive than in the prior 3-years. Do I see import wholesale domestic suppliers slashing prices in a major way? I would have to say, no. Although all-in landed container costs have dropped significantly, you must remember that most of these suppliers have landed a big part of their 2023 already, and at the prior higher costs.

I have had several customers contact me for some insight on what the coming 2023, and even 2024 seasons look like, in hopes to get a gauge on buying accordingly. None of us have a crystal ball. How bad will inflation and interest rates continue to climb? Will Tuesday Fourth of July in 2023 cause a drop in sales? We just don't know. One positive that I was reminded of this past week is that we will have a leap year over the mid-week of Wednesday Fourth of July in 2024. I think we would all take anything that gets us closer to the weekends and toss in some good weather while we're at it!

Yes, there is much uncertainty out there and none of us have the answers on how this might impact our businesses. However, there are a couple of things I am certain about. I am certain that folks who love their fireworks will continue to find their fireworks and celebrate with their families. I am certain that those of you/us in the fireworks business are some of the hardest working people I've seen, and I am certain that you/we will find a way, just as we have proven through the past, most challenging, years this industry has seen. I am also very certain that if you want top-selling, top-quality, top-value, unique fireworks with top-notch customer service, you need to call NCI!

From my family to yours, may you have a very Merry Christmas and a safe and prosperous 2023!


Jeff Brandenburg
Vice President of Sales



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VICE PRESIDENT - 16TH SEASON

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ACCOUNTS PAYABLE - 8TH SEASON

JACKIE RETZ
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SEAN ALEXANDER
WAREHOUSE MANAGER - 24TH SEASON

DUSTIN ALEXANDER
ASST. WAREHOUSE MANAGER - 2ND SEASON

JACK MILLER
PRODUCTION MANAGER - 34TH SEASON

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PYROTECHNICS GUILD INTERNATIONAL

2023 CONVENTION

AUG 5-11TH, 2023

LOCATION TBD

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON PGI:

WWW.PGI.ORG

NATIONAL FIREWORKS ASSOCIATION

NFA FALL EXPO, FT. WAYNE, INDIANA

SEPTEMBER 11-15TH, 2023

FOR INFORMATION ON NFA'S EXPO:

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2023 WINTER CONFERENCE

FEBRUARY 21-24TH, 2023

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