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Meet the Merchant

Interviewed by Luke Whittaker lwhittaker@coastriverbusinessjournal.com

How long have you been involved with the business?

"My mom and dad bought the store in 1975. I started working in high school after school on Saturdays. Then I went off to college. My plan after college was to play every golf course in Oregon. After about three days, my dad said to come back to work, so I did. I've been doing it ever since."

Can you tell me a little about what products and services you offer?

"Essentially if someone is building a brand-new house or remodeling, we can supply everything from the foundation to the roof and everything in between."

Has the business changed or evolved over the years?

"Yes, the only constant is change. When mom and dad bought the store in 1975, I think there were four people and two trucks. Now we have 18 or 19 people and four trucks. In 1975, it was a dark and dreary lumberyard and mom and dad realized that in order to make the store successful we had to appeal more to women. We cleaned things up, brought in lighting and wallpaper and kept going along."

When is the busiest season?

"In the summer, from May through October."

What will the arrival of spring mean for business?

"It certainly gets busier. In the store side we'll bring in a lot of lawn and garden items. For customers, who have been inside all winter, they will want to get outside and do stuff. We'll have more products to cleanup and work outside the house."

What impact has the internet had?

"Some positive, some negative. For the last few years the biggest influence we've seen has been the online shopping through Amazon and other places. Sometimes it can be tough to compete. We're working on updating the website with a new ship-to-store feature that will make things a little more competitive."

What impact did the 2008 recession have on the business?

"It hurt. For us things were offset from the hurricane in December 2007."

**Jeff Newenhof**
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We were busy right on through. In May 2008 people would ask how the business was and it was pretty good — we were up about 20% — and they all thought I meant down by 20% because that's what most of the country was. For us the recession didn't really happen until late October 2008. The sales and transactions just dropped over about a week period. We tightened our belts and made it through."

Has business bounced back since then?

"Oh yeah."

Who are your primary customers?

"We have three areas of focus. Through the front door of the store are the retail customers, often people who rent who are trying to fix things up. We have a commercial and industrial side. And then we have the contractors who are seeking things for new homes and remodeling."

What accounts for a majority of your sales?

"There's no single item. Lumber is certainly the biggest department in volume. Our top departments are lumber, paint and plumbing."

Is it changing?

"Everything changes as new technology comes into the industry. Twenty years ago we didn't sell any Oregon Strand Boards but now we sell a lot."

What are some of the advancements in paint or lumber you've observed over the years?

"Lumber is a commodity thing. The days of people buying 2x4 for floor joists are virtually over. Almost every new home project has wood 'I' beam construction."

Why are more embracing 'I' beams versus conventional 2x4 construction?

"It's a more consistent product, easier to handle, and faster. All of those factors offset the price difference."

Are there new products on the horizon you're considering offering?

"We're always looking for new stuff. We did a complete remodel of the retail store in 2018."

What did the remodel entail?

"We put down a brand-new maple floor throughout the whole store, added new gondola (shelving) and fixtures. We also added \$150,000 of new merchandise."

What part do you enjoy the most?

"I enjoy almost everything, might be easier to say what don't I like (Ha-ha)"

What's the most challenging part?

"The most challenging part is finding employees that want to work. It's a constant battle."

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