

PRO DEALER OF THE YEAR

Doug Kuiken, president
and co-owner of Kuiken
Brothers Company



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Anybody can “Just do it.” The trick is to “Get it right.”

And if you can keep getting it right for 105 years, then you have a good chance of getting noticed around the industry. Case in point: Fair Lawn, N.J.-based Kuiken Brothers Company, *HBSD* Dealer’s 2017 Pro Dealer of the Year.

Not coincidentally, the company’s slogan is “Get it right.”

“Kuiken Brothers exemplifies the gold standard for the retail lumber industry,” said Rita Ferris, president of the Northeastern Retail Lumber Association. “From their state-of-the-art technology, cooperative business approach, to their innovative promotions, they are the company to turn to when you are looking for industry best practices.”

The company has played an active role in the NRLA executive committee, as well as the New Jersey Building Material Dealers Association board of directors, and other industry leadership roles — including with LMC, the dealer’s buying group.

Kuiken Brothers serves the densely populated tri-state, New York City Metropolitan market with a distinctive New Jersey accent. Seven of the company’s eight stores are in Northern New Jersey — roughly between exits 142 and 171 on the Garden State Parkway. An eighth store is north of the border in Warwick, N.Y. And a ninth facility taking shape today in Newark, N.J., is expected to play a significant role in the company’s future growth.

“Newark gets us closer to the urban markets,” says Doug Kuiken, president and third generation co-owner of the company. The ninth location will sit on a 10-acre site on Newark Bay, with great access to ports, highways, airports and multifamily opportunities.

“It’s only going to get busier,” Kuiken added. “Newark itself is in the midst of a redevelopment, and between that site and Bayonne and Jersey City, there’s a lot of activity.”

Dealer differentiation

Active markets are better than quiet markets. But one thing about business that Kuiken has learned over the years — a pro dealer has to earn its market share. And there are plenty of places where customers can go for building materials. A conversation that Kuiken had with a customer years ago continues to motivate him.

“I remember when I was trying to

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collect on a past due account, and the customer told me: 'Be careful. Don't push me too hard. Because I can buy this [stuff] anywhere.' And he was fundamentally right. Customers can buy building materials in a lot of different places. So the question I ask myself is: how do we make ourselves valuable to our customers so they should buy from us? And that's how we attempt to differentiate ourselves on a daily basis, and on a strategic long-term basis."

The Newark project isn't the only example of recent expansion at Kuiken Brothers. The company's Emerson, New Jersey, facility underwent an expansion that doubled the size of the facility, which is tucked away off a main street a stone's throw from the active downtown.

Among the features of the newly expanded store are a drive-through lumberyard, Sunbel Racks, that allows for easy-on, easy-off material loading,

and a companion kitchen design center in a neighboring building.

Corporate culture

With their cupola's, rooster weather vanes and detailed facades, the architecture of a Kuiken Brothers store can easily be placed in the high-end of the LBM industry. But the Kuiken Brothers culture places an even higher importance on the people who occupy the buildings.

The president is quick to describe the company's people as its sustainable competitive advantage. Very recently, Kuiken Brothers adopted a more aggressive approach to its training — from beginner orientation to product knowledge to sales skills. The program is called "KBU," or Kuiken Brothers and You.

"It's people," Kuiken emphasized. "It's how we hire, train, groom, and establish our methods of operation and inculcate people into the culture."

Next in line on the Kuiken Brothers culture are differentiators such as

high-quality products, service and knowledge, reliable delivery. "We have to be the 'yes' people," Kuiken said.

"Our slogan 'Get it right' is not just about getting the right amount of material on a truck," Kuiken said. "It's getting it right with our customers, getting it right with our employees. It's getting our design right. It's being the best we can be."

Economy and challenges

With Newark in the works, and the economy of Northern New Jersey humming, Kuiken expects growth to continue. "If you're not growing your days are numbered," Kuiken said. "Good things follow good things."

For Kuiken Brothers, growth is likely to continue on the path of building on the existing core, wherever that makes sense. That could come in the form of an acquisition, a green field project or expansion of an existing store.

"We'll keep looking," Kuiken said. "But we've got a lot on our plate at the moment."



In the footsteps of Vitruvius

It might look like a typical display wall, maybe a bit more elaborate than most moulding displays found in pro dealer showrooms. But the Kuiken Brothers Mouldings wall is more than just a pretty space. It's a living wall of architectural history.

Kuiken Brothers for years has emphasized its high-quality, historically authentic moulding-offering. About six years ago, it unveiled its KB Classical Moulding brand, which leans heavily on research of the old homes of the Eastern United States.

In the summer of 2016, the company bolstered its offering with a digital Moulding Design Guide, which models itself after the architectural pattern books from the 19th and early 20th

centuries — which in turn descended from the work of first century Roman architect Vitruvius.

The combinations featured in the Moulding Design Guide draw heavily on Kuiken's Classical Moulding Collection, spanning architectural styles such as Early American, Georgian, Federal, Colonial Revival, Greek Revival and Traditional Revival.

The moulding and millwork program is one of the areas that Kuiken believes it can differentiate itself from other building material dealers.

The company says the design guide fills "a large void of accessible millwork pattern books for builders, remodelers, architects and designers."



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