

Green Initiatives

An Interview with Mike McCrobie,
Vice President-Construction Services, 84 Lumber Company

EDITORS' NOTE Mike McCrobie assumed his current post in 2007. He started with 84 Lumber in March of 1998 as a part-time yard associate in Star City, West Virginia. He moved into a manager trainee post in 1999 and became a co-manager in 2000. Later that year, he was appointed Manager of the Star City store, and became an area manager in 2002.



Mike McCrobie

COMPANY BRIEF 84 Lumber Company (84lumber.com) maintains its corporate headquarters in Eighty Four, Pennsylvania, where the original store continues to operate. The company operates 255 stores and component-manufacturing plants, and employs more than 4,000 associates nationwide.

How has 84 Lumber's green focus evolved?

Our corporate responsibility starts with our mission as a company. To remain and continue to grow, we have to be contemporary enough to understand that the market is changing and evolving, and we have a high-level focus on that in many different departments.

We talk about responsibility, reliability, and proven brands, be that 84 as a company or via the products we sell. We spend a lot of time identifying new goods and services that we can offer our customers that are green and sustainable.

In doing this, we also have to consider issues like government regulations and how we manage our risk.

We're a part of the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), which promotes responsible stewardship of the world's forests by ensuring the chain of custody of timber. We have 50 stores in our company that are FSC-Certified, and we're constantly training on the products and verification of FSC in our stores.

Also, our responsibility from a corporate standpoint is making sure we support our field associates so they're knowledgeable about the green origins of the goods, services, and products that we offer.

Is there a higher cost associated with green initiatives?

A lot of people look at the initial sticker price and don't understand the legacy and warranty issues that can be associated with less sustainable products.

We want to offer products that have a longer warranty and less maintenance, and which impact the consumer's life in a manner that allows them to have less exposure long term.

So, in some cases, the cost is higher initially, but you have to look at the downstream positive of those products.

What is involved in 84 Lumber's green building initiatives?

Our most dominant initiative is GreenEdge Supply, which we started in 2013. Our goal was to focus on ecologically friendly products, services, ratings systems, and certifications where we can both offer our stores green products and make sure our associates are educated about those products. We also offer our associates a chance to achieve levels of certification if they choose to do that, and we have classes that can be organized for them.

We're still getting this off the ground, but we have been focused on talking to our customers to understand what their initiatives are, and how we can evolve our program into specifics they can use as they continue to grow in a recovering marketplace.

Is there significant innovation within the U.S. in terms of building products? Are we still leaders in providing sustainable high-quality items?

Yes. As a company, we focus on products that are manufactured in the U.S. We have chosen that route for several reasons, chief among them being the quality of the American-made products as well as the warranties offered on those products. We believe as an American Company we need to support other American companies.

In some instances – especially on the commercial building side – these are government-funded projects. As a result, it's mandated that American products are used, or make up a high percentage of the products being used.

From the export side, American products are in high demand. In China, for instance, they want American products; they recognize the quality, and the fact that our products carry thorough and valid warranties. American products are also manufactured to meet or exceed a host of government regulations. While these regulations can at times be cumbersome, they also help to ensure safety when used properly.

Will we get to a point where green will just be a given?

We're just scratching the surface of the green building initiative. There are still a lot of products being developed and undergoing durability testing. The long-term savings and protection that these products provide isn't fully understood yet because they're still in the first cycle.

There is a lot of innovation that goes into green products. As a result, continuing education needs to occur and there has to be a comfort level on the part of professional contractors, architects, and ultimately the consumer, that these products will perform, and fulfill the promises of sustainability and durability.

What the builders are highly focused on now, which is only a fraction of the sustainable and green initiatives, is creating a more energy efficient home.

How critical has it been to maintain an entrepreneurial culture throughout the company?

What our founder, Joe Hardy, created and what it has evolved into, especially with the influence of his daughter (Maggie Hardy-Magerko, CEO), is a culture that is somewhat hard to explain, but as you advance through this company, you quickly learn that you are empowered to make decisions, encouraged to look at new ways to do things and, especially, as a store manager, run the business as if it's your own.

Our company runs on people, systems, and incentives, but the foundation of what Mr. Hardy was able to create and maintain is his belief in greenfield promotions and greenfield development of people.

If you start with this company as a manager trainee, you have the opportunity to become an assistant manager, a manager, an area manager, even the Chief Operating Officer, as did our current COO who started as a manager trainee. Even though this is a big company, our stores are set up as individual profit centers. If you're a manager of one of our locations, it's your business. This is probably one of the most impactful benefits we have as a company that allows us to continue the legacy.

You have also been of aid during unforeseen events. How important has it been for the company to offer support during times of need?

It's critical. We consider ourselves to be a good corporate citizen, but we also understand that goes beyond donating materials or money. It means having a commitment and a vision, and it's our responsibility to help those in need and we have demonstrated this in many ways.

We work closely with groups like the American Red Cross, Habitat for Humanity, and the Boy Scouts of America on an ongoing basis. When disasters like Hurricane Sandy strike, we quietly funded food pantries and shelters to help people through those early weeks of recovery. ●