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Harvey Building Products Works to Educate the Industry, Prepare for Future Growth

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Tom Bigony

The past year has been a rough one for manufacturers and dealers alike. Manufacturers like Harvey Building Products based in Waltham, Mass., have been working hard to make sure dealers are informed about many of the upcoming changes in the industry from lead to Homestar. DWM magazine spoke recently to Tom Bigony, co-chairman and chief executive officer, and Matt Samson, vice president of marketing, concerning these and other issues.

DWM: Tom, tell me a little about how long you've been with Harvey.

Bigony: I've been with the company for 30 years. I started in warehousing, loading trucks, etc., then moved into inside sales, outside sales, managed a branch for a period of time. I eventually moved to the corporate office and worked as a manager of human resources then eventually moved into general management. I have a degree in economics from Boston College and am a graduate of Harvard Business School.

DWM: I know your company has hosted private Harvey tradeshow for more than 25 years. Why do you think these are so popular and relevant for your customers?

Bigony: Every year there are new products and marketing services introduced that we unveil to our customers. But along with that we offer education on everything from the new lead laws to ENERGY STAR® training and on issues such as .30/.30.

For example, at this year's tradeshow circuit in January and February we held a series of certified renovator courses so companies could be trained to meet the EPA's new lead rules. We also conducted Installation Masters training as well.

DWM: How are your customers preparing themselves for the new lead requirements?

Bigony: We have put a big emphasis on this and so far have helped 600-700 of our customers go through the certified renovator training. We're not excited about a lot of the restrictions but we need

to get the industry prepared for the new rules. We want our customers to be able to effectively compete in the new arena.

Both lead and Installation Masters are outside certification programs, but we put a big focus on providing this type of training to our customers. We offer a lot of internal training too, including numerous branch warehouse demonstrations on new product installation.

Samson: Yes, providing education to our dealers is extremely important. For example, .30/.30 came almost without warning. At least with lead we had some notice and time to prepare.

Our highest performing windows already qualified for the new .30/.30 threshold. Our manufacturing team quickly created an upgrade package that allowed virtually all of our additional windows to qualify. Then, we focused on communicating these changes to our customers and helping them become certified.

We spent a fair amount of time talking with ENERGY STAR, the IRS and other parties. We tried to get literature out to customers quickly, a portion of our website was dedicated to the subject and we tried to make the message as clear as possible for the customer. We also organized some promotions around .30/.30.

DWM: Do you believe the Homestar program will further help the industry recover if it's passed?

Bigony: My own opinion is that it is a great program in principal. We need to be environmentally aware and we need to encourage homeowners to be more energy-efficient. But I also think that maybe the government is working a little too fast. The efforts are well intentioned, but we need to have a timeline so manufacturers can offer these products in a cost-effective manner.

Samson: The program has good components for the homeowner and it will help stimulate business; a rebate always seems to help. But like the EPA's lead program we think it will create more challenges for the trades. For example, the trade may need to issue immediate rebates, and post-job audits are being discussed. Again, it is well-intentioned, but there are still a lot of the details to be worked out.

DWM: How has your company fared in the last few challenging years?

Bigony: Our company has fared very well, but obviously it was a difficult year. But we are still profitable and still here so we are thankful for that. This year we are projecting to have an increase in sales. We're seeing that now and it seems to be part of the normal economic recovery. The tax credit helped us to some degree, but it was not the overriding factor to help our industry improve this year.

DWM: There are certainly a lot of major issues affecting manufacturers this year. Many companies are getting involved in talking to their legislators about specific issues. Has Harvey been involved in that?

Bigony: Since 1991 we have pretty much had 15 years of growth and did very little. This past year we are getting more aggressive in state involvement—you have to be a lot more involved now. We are writing e-mails to local representatives. I encourage everyone to get more involved than they ever have been.

DWM: What other initiatives does Harvey have planned for the coming year?

Samson: In 2010 we launched our "New Game Plan" business theme. We're trying to introduce new ways for our customers to win business and new ways for those companies who are now dusting themselves off to market themselves.

Bigony: We will continue to grow and continue to expand. It may be a little slower growth, but we do have plans to expand later this year. There is a lot going on here. You wouldn't know we are coming out of a recession.

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