

BY JAMES ANDERSON

TEAM PLAYERS

IN THE BACKYARD OF PURDUE UNIVERSITY, HENRY POOR LUMBER LINES UP WITH CUSTOMERS.

LBM dealers who have learned to last in this industry have a way of serving a need in their communities and turning that service into sustained business. That's exactly what Henry Poor Lumber has done in Lafayette, Indiana, for the past century.

Celebrating its 100th anniversary this year, Henry Poor Lumber still operates the one-location lumberyard that has been a backbone of its community for a century, and throughout the years the company has grown right along with Greater Lafayette and the surrounding area. In 1998 the company relocated to its current location in Lafayette to accommodate major road expansion in West Lafayette.

Now with a full service design center and showroom, a freestanding flooring store, a wood packaging operation, and a wall panel facility, Henry Poor continues to discover new ways to serve the needs of its growing customer base.

For seven years, the company has operated Flooring Express, a freestanding flooring store that sells the latest trends and styles in carpet, hardwood, vinyl, and tile flooring. A mile away from the lumberyard, Henry Poor manufactures wood packaging and shipping crates.

Getting into the wood packaging business stemmed from more than just identifying a need within the Henry Poor customer base. It was also born of a need to provide work for team members during the Great Recession.

Henry Poor's expansion into wall-panel manufacturing enables it to both help builders deal with labor shortages and meet the continued growth of nearby Purdue University.



"During the downturn, business got very slow. We had the team members here, so we entered into the wood packaging business. We make specialty crates, containers and pallets" says Henry Poor President Jay Andrew.

The wood packaging plant caters to large manufacturers that have to ship their products long distances. Henry Poor Lumber is certified for international shipping, and the crates and containers meet those qualifications. Many of the shipping customers have heavy manufacturing plants overseas. Henry Poor builds containers for wiring harnesses, drive trains, tractor trailer parts, and other large, heavy pieces.

"There are a lot of guys who build pallets, but we're a specialized wood packaging manufacturer. If you're looking for a standard pallet, that's not for us. If you want to ship a Lamborghini transmission to Germany, we're your guys," Andrew explains. "It's a good business for us. It's diverse, a different customer base."

WALL PANELS

With a lumberyard customer base that is 80% pro contractors, Henry Poor has found a way to serve them beyond the products offered at the yard. The company also manufactures wall panels for builders, a facet of their business that steadily picks up as the building industry struggles with an increasing labor shortage.

The panels have become quite popular, Andrew says, though he admits that not all builders have seen the process as the right way to go. It helps, however, that his family's business is located in Lafayette, essentially in the back yard of the growing and expanding Purdue University, where student housing necessitates the use of wall panels to speed the building process. ➤



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— JAY ANDREW

CEO Jim Andrew (center) purchased the business in 1982 and has begun transitioning leadership of the company to his sons Tom (left, Vice President) and Jay (right, President).

“We’re blessed being in a college like Purdue’s backyard. They continue to bring in people from around the world who are studying here, teaching here, setting up shop and living here,” Andrew says.

Because of its proximity to a major university, the area also recently saw the opening of a new GE Aviation plant about two miles from Henry Poor Lumber. The plant does the final assembly for GE’s Next-Generation LEAP jet engine.

“Those are the kinds of encouraging things for the local economy, the careers that people come to study at Purdue for and stay here and start families here. That, in turn, benefits our business.”

THE TEAM

With the yard and design showroom, flooring store, wood packaging plant and wall manufacturing, one might guess that hundreds of people work for Henry Poor Lumber. In fact, there are 70 team members total, 67 of which are full time. Andrew says he typically starts employees as part time at first, then rolls them into full time team members when they both know it’s the right fit.

He’s been lucky, he says, in finding “great men and women looking for great careers.” Having all hands on deck and the right team members in the right place is important to his team. Andrew says he is fortunate to have found dedicated team members who are passionate about their work. Like most everywhere else in the country, labor is in high demand in Lafayette.

“Since the downturn, everyone had to hit the reset button, which is good for our industry, but it’s challenging because now there’s a labor shortage,” he says.

Henry Poor Lumber continues to expand its footprint and services to meet the changing needs of the community. This includes a separate design center and showroom, a stand-alone flooring store (shown below), a wood packaging operation, and a wall panel facility.



A new program called Build Your Future is opening doors to younger team hires for the Henry Poor companies. As part of the local builder’s association, the program allows for building trades professionals to meet with high school students and even pre-high school, to talk about careers in the building construction industry.

“We’re able to show them the opportunities available, whether that’s in the lumberyard, or as a sales specialist, designer, or fabricator, or out in the field and having their own framing crew or being a fireplace technician,” Andrew says. “It helps us get in front of the future generation. These kids think they want to work for Google, Amazon or Facebook, and construction too often gets overlooked. We’re able to plant that seed early on. We get them engaged in our operations and with our passionate team members. We show them the building construction industry is a great place to establish a career.”

FAMILY STORY

Those passionate team members are particularly important to Andrew because he’s building upon a 100-year foundation. Jim Andrew, Jay’s father, purchased the business from the family of Frank Taylor, who had bought into the business that was originally founded by Ed Munger and Frank’s father-in-law Henry Poor.

Jim Andrew graduated from Ball State University with a degree in urban planning and worked for the state of Indiana right out of college. But he got sawdust in his veins, as they say, while working part time during college for Henry Poor Lumber. After a career as an urban planner, Jim Andrew returned to the Greater Lafayette area and Henry Poor Lumber to work. In 1982, he purchased the business. Jim Andrew is now CEO and is semi-retired. Jay is President and his brother, Tom, helps lead the company as Vice President.

Jay Andrew worked at the store during summers growing up, and after graduating from Purdue University he worked elsewhere for a number of years. But, like many sons of lumbermen, he couldn’t stray too far from the family business.



“I came to realize that it’s different in the corporate world,” he says. “It was a great learning experience to get out there and see that side of things, and it made me more valuable coming back and getting involved.”

Back at the family business, Andrew says he was able to look at the company “through a different set of eyes.”

Returning to the business, he was able to help the company focus on what it was good at, he says, like kitchens, bathrooms, windows, doors, exterior claddings, trim and so on. As the big box stores moved in around them, the Henry Poor team discontinued paint, electrical and plumbing so they could increase their focus on developing the design center and showroom, “a place where customers can kick the tires and try out the newest trends and styles. When they’re able to see, touch and feel a product, that’s so much more than what they see and experience on the internet,” he says.

COMPETITION

With the growing population around Lafayette comes a growth in competition. Andrew says he has two Menards, a Home Depot, and a Lowe’s in his area. Yet he doesn’t worry too much about losing market share there.

“Those guys are ok,” he says. “They serve their purpose. What we have over them is flexibility and the years of experience, expertise and dedicated service in our team members. We possess the willingness and desire to get the job done right.”

Andrew says there are also some one-step specialty dealers in the market that keep things competitive. Another independent operates in the area and he says he doesn’t mind competing with them because, “They understand the market and are interested in building relationships. They understand there’s more to it than market share and running sales numbers up.”

Andrew’s focus remains on catering to his growing customers’ needs. “That’s the way we grow with customers. We do some of the things for them [like wall panels], and we

With quality labor in demand, the Andrews say they’re fortunate to have such a passionate, experienced team at Henry Poor. At the same time, the company is always looking to the future when it comes to its team, working closely with a local builders association to promote careers in the construction trades among area students.

don’t hesitate to evaluate and bring in a product line that a customer has a need for. We pride ourselves on getting the right products to the right place, on-time and in-full. We have a great group of men and women who make that happen on a daily basis.”

The custom mill shop allows Henry Poor Lumber to make adjustments to products and in doing so the company has built a reputation as the supplier that can find a way to get things done for its customers. In essence, Andrew says, Henry Poor customers have come to depend on the flexibility and customization in a wide range of services.

“We listen to what our customers want and need and we find the right way to get it done for them,” he says. “We’re a strong team here at Henry Poor Lumber, and we take great pride in being part of their team.” ■

GET TO KNOW HENRY POOR LUMBER

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| FOUNDED: | 1918 |
| OWNERSHIP: | FAMILY-OWNED |
| LOCATIONS: | ONE LUMBERYARD WITH A DESIGN SHOWROOM, FLOORING STORE, WOOD PACKAGING PLANT, AND WALL PANEL MANUFACTURING PLANT |
| EMPLOYEES: | 70 |
| CO-OP/BUYING GROUP: | DO IT BEST |
| TOP THREE VENDORS: | GAF, PLY GEM, WEYERHAEUSER |