Interview with Chris Rice

About Kellex…
About the industry…
About what drives him…

Kellex: What's something you miss (or really enjoyed) about the early days of Kellex?

Chris: *I definitely miss my friend and partner – Doug Fawcett. Doug was a constant force, friend and mentor. Our friendship was born out of genuine love for one another and our mission/commitment to the community. As with any new start up, there were days we wanted to give up or seek an easier occupation, but we both would not give up on each other.*

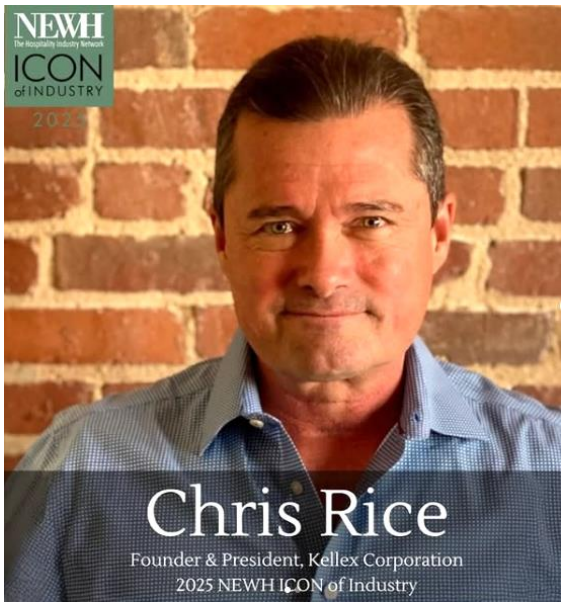


We set out to build upon our dreams and each day we have been blessed by miracles around us. It has been a dream to watch the Kellex family grow over the years – the commitment to one another is reminiscent to our early days.

Doug retired approx. 8 years ago to pursue his non-profit aspirations.

Kellex: What were some of the biggest challenges as you started out and how did you overcome them?

Chris: *Our roots started with Norwalk and Hickory Hill Furniture. Our goal was to provide employment support to those companies and the communities around them. They both seized operations in 2008. It was a devastating blow to their associates and should have put Kellex out of business as well. We banded together with the team and made the commitment we would go all out to continue. There are so many stories of how or why we should not have made it, however a new Kellex was born out of the ashes and lives on today in all of our associates.*



Kellex: Did you have a vision of what you wanted the culture at Kellex to be when you started out?

Chris: *Absolutely! We did not want to follow in the footsteps of the corporate world and their textbook behavior. We wanted a culture that promotes and recognizes people as individuals all while working towards a common goal. We have an amazing team that shares a common belief in serving one another. I often refer to us as a family business with a lot of different last names.*

Kellex: What are some examples of how you've created that over the years?

Chris: *We developed "Make It Here Make It Happen" as our mantra to make our products here in our communities and make it happen for our customers as well as our associates.*

Years ago, we also invested in a program to measure the impact of supply chain and employment opportunities on our local communities. This program is called "Hour America". It is attached to every single piece of furniture crafted by our associates. It drives us to work diligently so that we continue our impact on the many communities that provide us with labor, parts and shipping, just to name a few.

(keep reading!)

Another way that we build our culture at Kellex is by having a program called "Target Care" in our Valdese, NC Factory. The program is staffed by a nurse practitioner and is available to all Kellex associates. We offer free blood tests, skin exams and everyday medical needs. In addition, we are active with our local breast cancer awareness community. A mammogram bus is brought to the factory twice a year for free exams.

We offer free gym and aquatic center memberships and promote a program of healthy eating education complete with measurable results. We also host celebrations throughout the year that are focused on family and spiritual holidays.



Kellex: **Little known fact about Kellex:**

Chris: *We started above a garage in Norwalk, Ohio. Our foundation was sales, marketing and distribution for Norwalk companies which included Hickory Hill. We purchased our first factory in 2008 and now have over 455,000 square feet of manufacturing. We are one of, if not the most vertically integrated contract furniture manufacturer in the United States.*

Kellex is the largest manufacturer of upholstered furniture in vacation ownership properties.

The name Kellex is the combination of my brother's two children, Kelsey and Alex. Each of our businesses thereafter have a mix of the founder's children's names.

Kellex: **In regard to our industry, what excites you right now?**

Chris: *We are exploring new product capabilities, elevated service through strategic partnerships and potential acquisition opportunities.*

Kellex: **Many people today believe that Americans no longer want manufacturing jobs. As someone who is a proponent for American manufacturing and has 30 years of experience in it, do you believe this to be true?**

Chris: *While that may be a true statement in some industries and locations throughout the United States, I believe in rural America there is a strong desire to be a part of creating or making something. The communities around our plants are filled with families that have thrived for generations in manufacturing, but they also hope to continue this legacy in the future. They are proud with the knowledge that they have created furniture that is in some of the most beautiful resort settings in the US.*



With AI potentially eliminating or replacing a great many jobs, manufacturing of furniture is still and always will be done by highly skilled craftsmen. Our product is highly labor intensive. Most processes are still done by hand even in cases where there is some automation.

Kellex: **What drives you?**

Chris: *Not to sound cliché, but to serve and lift others, especially those who don't expect it and would not be considered a person in need. We are all in need of support, understanding and friendships.*

Kellex: **Do you set goals?**

Chris: *Early on, I always set goals. Now I don't drive hard on goals, but to lead with compassion and be the conduit for those who have a "can do" drive.*

Kellex: **What did you want to be when you grew up?**

Chris: *My first thoughts were that of becoming a Park Ranger due to my love of the outdoors. As I got a little older, I thought I may have a career in the service industry or own a tree and plant farm in central Florida. I was blessed with opportunities in retail while still in school and found my way into strategic sales planning in my early 20's.*

I am exactly where I belong and honestly still cannot completely grasp what Kellex has developed into this many years later.



Kellex Seating - Business Conservationist of the Year

Kellex: **Any good recent reads?**

Chris: *Currently I am reading one of the books from the Dalai Lama – "The Art of Happiness". The book before was by the same author – "The Path to Enlightenment".*

On my bookshelves that I pull from are two versions of the Bible. Both of the versions are educational and geared towards learning.

Kellex: **Little known fact about yourself?**

Chris: *I am an introvert and painfully shy person. I interact to serve others and from that I find joy.*

Kellex: **Do you collect anything?**

Chris: *Wayward animals. I seem to attract many strays or ones in need of some attention.*

Kellex: **Favorite music right now?**

Chris: *Music is my sanctuary. I have music playing constantly, in fact I walk through life usually with one headphone in listening to what I am feeling at the moment. At the moment, I am listening to what I would refer to as American acoustical story telling. Music about everyday life.*

Zach Bryan and Kasey Musgrave are always nearby in a playlist. My Apple playlist definitely captures my ADD. It covers about every genre you can think of. Life is my playlist. I enjoy it as much as one can.

Kellex: **Favorite location(s) in the world?**

Chris: *Home would be my first answer. Home is where the heart is!*

From a physical location – the Hawaiian Islands or wherever there is a beach and the energy of the oceans.

Kellex: **Who inspires you?**

Chris: *I have a great many people who have inspired me throughout my life. The list is actually very long and some that I never knew their name or ever saw again. But if I picked a person, it would be my mother. She is amazing!*