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Scholl Family Continues Lumber Yard Legacy

Scholl Lumber | Houston, Texas



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By Kathy Bowen Stolz

Ward Scholl is proud of his family-owned lumber yard, Scholl Lumber. Never mind that he followed in the footsteps of generations of Scholls who have made furniture or supplied lumber to builders in southeastern Texas. He finds that being the managing partner of the business that bears his family's name sets his lumber yard apart from the competition.

“The buck pretty much stops with me. I have the ability to make decisions to make customers happy without having to go up a chain of command. There's no one between me and the dispatcher or between me and the salesmen. If we need to react, it's done in a matter of seconds.

“Consequently, we can provide better customer service than the big nation-wide chain suppliers, especially in our faster delivery,” Scholl noted. If a customer calls in a fill-in order before 9 a.m., the company will deliver the order the same day. Larger orders always get next-day delivery, if not same day, the sixth generation owner said.

He said that the company's target customers are custom home builders in the Houston market area. “We like

dealing with other family-owned businesses rather than large corporations. Everything we do is one-on-one with the customer. Builders are constantly calling with unusual requests. The unusual becomes usual.”

A lot of builders have not heard of Scholl Lumber because it's a small company, Ward said. “We have a team of five outside salespeople who call on builders. It takes time and persistence to find the builder who's a good fit for us. Once they give us a try and see how good our service is, how good our products are and how much we strive to accommodate our customer's needs, they usually stay with us. Our service and price are our selling points. Our office and sales staff average 24 years of experience in the lumber business – a total of 285 years combined. We know how to take care of business.”

The lumber yard is open Monday through Friday from 7 a.m. to 3 p.m., although staff arrives at 5 a.m. to prepare for the day. The drivers try to get deliveries made before the afternoon rush hour begins to avoid travel delays. “We carry all the high-end building materials and custom floor trusses that custom home builders need.

We try to have the best product on the ground that compares to what anyone else has, but we also special order products for our customers every day. We have access to high-end brands of doors and windows as well – thanks to our LMC Co-op membership.”

Participating in the co-op gives family-owned lumber yards buying power of more than \$3 billion, exceeding the buying power of the company’s nation-wide chain competition. It’s a pricing advantage equivalent of buying one truckload of plywood compared to 400-500 truckloads of plywood, he said. “We’ve been in the co-op for four years. I bought directly from the manufacturers before that. Being a member of LMC is very beneficial for us and our customers.”

Scholl Lumber also has a multi-family division that brokers building materials to apartments, hotels and assisted living facilities nation-wide. These project are multi-million dollar projects that provide lumber, OSB, gypsum and siding shipped from the manufacturer directly to the projects. “My dad, Jack W. Scholl, pioneered that business model in the 1960s when he worked for my grandfather.”

Most of the Scholl customers take advantage of the in-house charge account option the company offers, according to Scholl. The home page of the website prominently displays a place to download a credit

application.

During the next five years the company may relocate. “We’re looking for a better facility to call home, but there aren’t too many places that don’t need a lot of modifications.” The company will expand on its window and door business, he said.

Also during the next five years another generation of Scholls may join the company, following in the footsteps of their ancestors. (The oldest of the seventh generation is a sophomore in college.)

They may follow the example of Ward himself, who started working at Scholl Forest as a college student





in the summer of 1985 when he worked as an order puller, truck driver and dispatcher. After graduating from Southwest Texas State University with a degree in marketing and management, Ward joined the company full-time. He didn't really consider anything else, he said. The business was in his blood.

The lumber business has flowed through the blood of many family members. In 2001, Ward and his sisters Kim White and Cindy Segrest purchased the company from their father, Jack W. Scholl, just as he had purchased the company from his father, Jackson H. Scholl in 1976, who had purchased the company from his father, Henry F. Scholl, who was the son of Heinrich F. Scholl, who was the son of Heinrich Scholl, Sr., an immigrant from Germany.

Not quite a biblical lineage, but certainly a lineage of resilient businessmen who have weathered economic downturns in almost every generation. (See the company website, www.SchollLumber.com, for more details.)

When Ward's father Jack W. owned the company, he focused the local business on providing materials mostly for tract home builders. But Ward completely changed the local customer base to custom builders after the 2008 recession forced the company to sell off assets, including its Scholl Truss & Component Company business, and close briefly in the winter of 2009-10.

Rather than end the family-owned business, he said they made some hard decisions, relocating to their former truss manufacturing facility and establishing the offices in a double-wide trailer. "We're all smarter as a result of the Great Recession. We now are debt free, have very low overhead and are focused on great companies to do business with."

Of the 30 employees, many returned to Scholl after the brief shutdown. "We're a good company to work for. As a small, family-owned business, we take care of our people like we take care of our customers," Ward said.

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