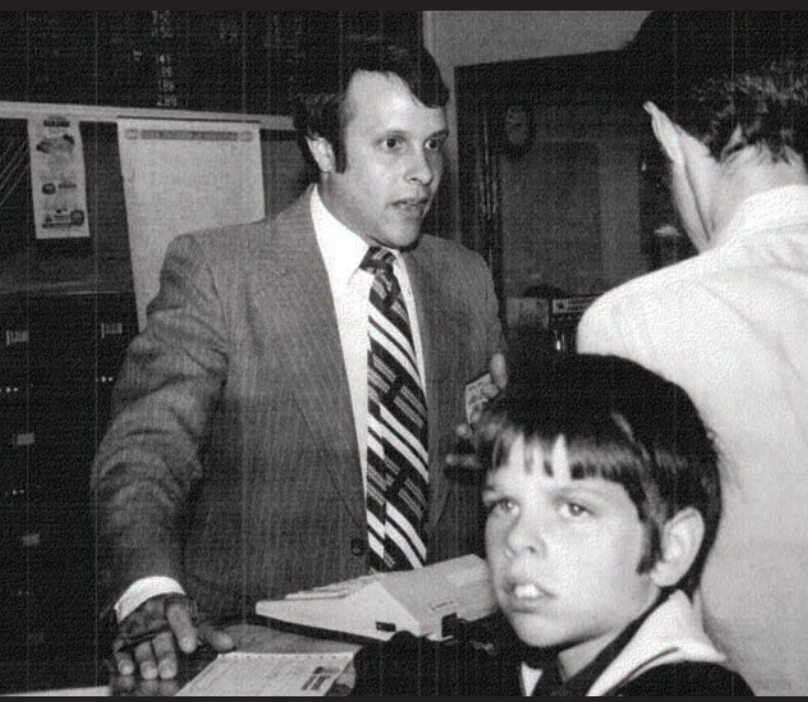


Safe at Sanford



On a July day in 2017, John Dubrowin, 64, starts work at Sanford & Hawley Incorporated, a family-owned lumber retail company located in Unionville, Conn.

John is currently the company's human resources director—organizing worker orientations, staff trainings, and more—in his 22nd year with the Sanfords. He initially accepted their offer to work as a dispatcher in 1995.

John has been involved in the retail industry since high school. He grew up in White Plains, N.Y., with both his parents. His father was an executive for Diamond International, which owned Diamond Lumber Company.

"I was the one straightening out all the bent nails as a child," John said.

When John was 18 years old, he started working for F. W. Woolworth Company in New York City. Then, at 25 years old, he was introduced to the building material industry and worked for Diamond Lumber as a helper on a truck.

"I worked in the yard, waited on customers, and helped move things into stores," John said. "I literally started at the ground-floor in the lumber industry and worked my way up."

John attended college at the University of Tampa. However, all the while he tackled a full course load, he worked 49 additional hours every week.

"I've taken on a lot of responsibility from an early age," John said. He was married during his junior year of college and had his son six weeks after graduation.

John eventually moved back from Florida and has since held jobs at multiple lumber companies.

"The companies I have worked for have been mostly family-owned," John said. "I've found that you're more an individual there than you are a number, and you're able to make more of an impact than you would be able to working for a bigger box store."

During the economic downturn of the late '80s, John was working as a manager for a company called Continental Lumber, which crashed and sent John back out into the world of job hunting.

During that time, he accepted a job at Home Depot after helping Continental Lumber sell their facility to—unbeknownst to him at the time—his future employers, Bob, Ted, and Frank Sanford.

The Sanfords offered John a job shortly after their introduction, but John couldn't initially accept because their offer was not competitive with Home Depot and he had a family to feed.

Five years later, after interviewing once a year, every year, John and the Sanfords consummated a deal and he left Home Depot.

& Hawley By Anna Tailleux



“Going back to what I said earlier about being more an individual than a number,” John said, “I could tell the Sanfords were that way. They were very much invested in their employees, and I was interested in working for a company like theirs.”

Since joining the Sanfords, John has held multiple positions, including the one he has now as human resources director.

“When I took over human resources,” John said, “and was no longer on the front lines dealing with customers, I made it my mission that the employees are my customers, and I approach things to take care of the employee like I would be taking care of a customer.”

John goes on to tell a story that happened in 1988, just a few years before he started working at Sanford and Hawley, where a mill employee injured themselves using a saw.

Though the Sanfords knew about OSHA, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, they were hesitant to reach out, as they believed the administration was an enforcement service, which could result in penalties and citations to the company.

However, the local Connecticut OSHA operates much differently than the company originally perceived.

The program offers free, confidential safety and health advice to small and medium-sized businesses like Sanford and Hawley, and consultants work with employees to identify workplace hazards and provide advice and assistance on compliance with OSHA standards.

In 2000, John and the Sanfords decided to reach out to Conn-OSHA and were happy they did because, just a few years into the company’s relationship with OSHA, they received an award from OSHA’s Safety and Health Achievement Recognition program for their injury and illness prevention practices.

“Year after year,” John said, “we keep improving things and inviting these people [Conn-OSHA] back into our stores because, not only do we need to protect our facilities, but we need to protect our workers, too.”

Moving forward, John and the Sanfords hope to educate other lumber retail businesses about the importance of implementing safety awareness and accident prevention practices.

“In the old days, there were so many hazardous things to be found,” John said. “There weren’t safety manuals or any real guarding of tools. Facilities and workers weren’t being rightly protected, and there’s no reason for that to be happening still today.” **LG**