

Made in the U.S.A.

Bergen-based Kuiken Brothers celebrates 100 years with America-themed moulding line

WRITTEN BY ELISABETH SALEMME WALKER

The story of Kuiken Brothers is the epitome of the American dream. In the late 1800s, Nicholas, Dirk and Henry Kuiken, brothers from Holland who were builders

by trade, emigrated to New Jersey and

began working in construction. By 1912, Kuiken Brothers was founded, and 100 years later, the company is stronger than ever.

"It's a really good American story," says Doug Kuiken, a third-generation member of the family who, along with some other third- and fourth-generation Kuikens, oversees about 240 employees. "They began growing a business and honing their crafts; and they ended up vacating the construction business to focus more on the material side. They were true craftsmen. They made a lot of their own projects, and that is the nexus of the business we're in today."

This year marks the centennial birthday for the company, which has sprawled throughout Bergen County – Emerson, Midland Park, Garfield – with headquarters in Fair Lawn, and five more surrounding locations.

"Like any birthday, they are all snapshots in time," Kuiken says. "It's a great time to reflect on how you got there, what your roots are, what was it that caused us to put 100 years under our belt, and what remains of that original culture today."

Kuiken says its strong work ethic,

integrity and honesty, and a "get it right" mentality have helped the company maintain success.

"We stick to what we know well," he says. "We're good at what we do and we continue to grow and expand the business. We're all very thankful for what was

instilled in us by our parents and grandparents. Our 100th anniversary is a springboard for the next go-around."

Kuiken recognizes that the family business is currently "in the crosshairs of a bad economy," but he is also well aware that the company has

survived two world wars and the Great Depression.

"Most family businesses tend to disintegrate in a lot less time than 100 years," he says. "We're a firm believer in the culture of honesty and integrity. Getting it right means a whole lot. That tone is set at the top and runs very deep in the organization. All of our associates appreciate the fact that we are 100 years old."

AMERICAN MADE

Kuiken Brothers' successful American story has inspired the company to demonstrate its patriotism through its award-winning "Made in the USA" KB Classical moulding line. The collection includes 66 crown, casing, base, chair-rail and panel mouldings, all of which are historically inspired by classical American designs from more than two centuries ago. ➤



WALL TO WALL Kuiken Brothers KB Classical moulding line is inspired by American designs and made of wood milled from U.S. forests.

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DOUG KUIKEN



FLASHBACK The Kuiken Brothers Hardware store in Fair Lawn, circa 1960, on the corner of Fair Lawn Avenue and 6th Street.

100-YEAR ANNIVERSARY BOOK

To mark its 100th anniversary, Kuiken Brothers will release a book later this year that will detail the company's evolution.

"We're gathering a lot of information, even looking back through early documents and early pictures, to document in a chronological order how the company grew up," Doug Kuiken says.

The effort to string together Kuiken Brothers' roots and progression over the years is being led by Jon Kuiken, a Ph.D. candidate at Boston College. He is writing the book, which will be deeply rooted in the company's history and culture.

"Who better than to have a family member put it all together?" Kuiken says.

Researchers for Kuiken Brothers studied photographs of the interior and architectural millwork of local colonial homes through the Library of Congress's Historic American Building Survey. The company collaborated with nationally recognized historic moulding and millwork expert Brent Hull to ensure that Kuiken's mouldings were authentic. Hull then sketched several mouldings that were used in many early American homes.

All the mouldings in the collection use wood milled from U.S. forests, including yellow poplar, found in Eastern North America. Poplar is a non-bleeding wood that mills to a smooth surface, which can allow for sharp lines and crisp edges – essential elements of early American moulding design.

"We wanted to go back to that early American theme," Kuiken says. "These [KB Classical moulding] profiles all go back to and are deeply rooted in colonial era times."

Larry Dykhous of Dykhous Construction in Midland Park has been using the moulding line for about a year.

"It gave a lot more design opportunities than just the run-of-the-mill [moulding options]," Dykhous says. "It allowed us to be more creative and give customers more options. We're better because we can give them more options. It gave us a leg up."

He says the "Made in the USA" product appeals to him because "to be blue collar in this area is hard enough, so as many jobs as we can keep here is better."

In addition, the ability to get the product in a few days, as opposed to the weeks it would take to receive something produced overseas, is a benefit.

Dykhous adds that the poplar wood "paints beautifully," which is another bonus.

"The options that they give us are great," he says. "Years ago, there were only a certain amount [of moulding designs] that we could choose from. When we get in older homes, if we want to match mouldings, we would have to fabricate and make them, which is expensive. This allows us to get very close [to the original designs]."

Kuiken says they have only just begun telling their "Made in the USA" story to potential customers in the past few months.

"It will resonate with customers as we tell the story and they begin to see it for what it really is," he says.

As Kuiken Brothers looks into the future, its goal is to stay at the forefront of the industry.

"We like to grow," Kuiken says, adding that growth includes changing, honing and constantly looking at new products. The company opened its ninth location in Succasunna in 2011.

"To be able to open another location shows our commitment to the industry," he says. "We're always looking forward to grow the business, whether it's location, product or territory." ■

