

LBM JOURNAL DEALER OF THE YEAR 2020

ANNUAL SALES: \$100 MILLION +

LBM Journal's Dealer of the Year Awards recognize four LBM companies of different sizes that epitomize the entrepreneurial spirit. By our definition, a Dealer of the Year describes a company in which leadership excels at identifying underserved—or emerging—markets, satisfying customers, and constantly working to grow and improve business. Our 2020 winners—Kuiken Brothers, Gillman Home Center, Lang Building Supply, and R.T. Griffis & Sons—represent vastly different operations. The common thread in these companies is their fierce commitment to finding ever better ways to serve their customers and their communities.

PEOPLE-FOCUSED PROFITS

BY JAMES ANDERSON

WHILE EACH OF THE 2020 DEALER OF THE YEAR honorees can be considered in a class by themselves, Kuiken Brothers has achieved that ranking quite literally. It is because of the company's Dealer of the Year nomination that an entirely new category was created for the annual recognition program.

Kuiken Brothers is the first LBM Journal Dealer of the Year in the category of more than \$100 million in sales. In previous years, the program topped out at a \$50 million+ category.

Based in Fair Lawn, New Jersey, Kuiken Brothers is made up of a total of nine locations in New Jersey and New York. The newest location, in Newark, opened in September 2019. Founded in 1912, the company operated a single location in Fair Lawn until 1991 when it grew via acquisition. Through the years the company grew steadily by serving residential builders until 2003 when an acquisition in Garfield, N.J. specialized in commercial building materials. ➤

FROM LEFT: Nick Kuiken, VP of sales;
Henry Kuiken, executive VP;
Doug Kuiken, president;
Matt Kuiken, VP of operations;
Ken Kuiken, VP commercial business;
Michael Kuiken, VP.

PHOTO BY NICK BENEDETTO NBPRO.MEDIA

“When we acquired the Garfield location in 2003, we jumped in with both feet on what was a pure commercial supply: drywall, acoustical ceilings, steel studs, and so on,” said the company’s President, Doug Kuiken. “With that whole transition, we have blended our business to include both residential and commercial materials. We’re really a building materials business. No longer just Kuiken Brothers lumber company.”

NEWARK EXPANSION

The company’s latest expansion in Newark has brought Kuiken Brothers closer to one of its larger markets.

“Newark is situated in an urban setting. While that may be different than most of our existing locations, it’s a market that we have been shipping direct to for many years,” said

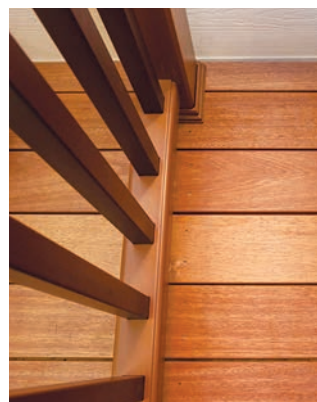
Doug Kuiken. “There’s a lot of activity in Newark and the surrounding cities of Jersey City, Bayonne, and Hoboken. The site will allow for faster delivery into the whole New York metropolitan area.”

The new site in Newark is strategically located in the heart of the distribution hub of New York and New Jersey. The site has access to all the major roadways, an active rail spur, and commercial access to the waterfront for future development opportunities.

“This is an expensive place to live, work, and do business, but there is also tremendous opportunity here for those invested in the market as we are. The City of Newark is an exciting and attractive place to be, and we’re well positioned to take advantage of long-term growth here as a resident member of the Newark business community.”



With nine locations in New Jersey and New York, Kuiken Brothers serves a customer base of 95% residential and commercial pro contractors, while specialists guide homeowners through windows and doors, decking, and moulding options in the stores’ showrooms.



Matt Kuiken, VP of operations, stands at the latest Kuiken Brothers location in Newark. The new site has access to major roadways, an active rail spur, and commercial access to the waterfront for future development opportunities.



PHOTO BY NICK BENEDETTO NBPRO.MEDIA

With building material specialists across nine locations, Kuiken Brothers was able to in-fill the Newark location with seasoned staff members as well as hire new employees from the local community.

Throughout its locations, Kuiken Brothers remains fiercely dedicated to serving professional contractors. In fact, 95% of its customers are pro builders and remodelers working on projects ranging from residential homes to multi-family, mixed use, and mid-rise buildings.

With a heavy focus on pro contractors, even the showrooms at Kuiken Brothers locations cater to the needs of the builder. While the showrooms display products for homeowners to make informed selections, specialists guide their customers through the process.

“They appreciate having a place to send their clients and customers,” said Doug Kuiken. “We provide the expertise in windows, doors, decking, moulding, structural components, interiors, and everything in between. We help facilitate sales for our contractor customers—taking some of that responsibility off their plate. We’re a solutions partner for our customers, and we’re happy to provide that high level of service.”

SOCIAL MEDIA LEADERS

An early decision to focus on social media has brought Kuiken Brothers to the forefront of the building industry community online. Chances are if you’re following building industry insiders and influencers on social media, you’ve run across a Kuiken Brothers post on Instagram.

“Strategically, connecting with people is different than it had been. We’re doing it very aggressively and successfully, and it’s an initiative of Ryan Mulkeen, director of marketing,” said Matt Kuiken, VP of operations, son of President Doug Kuiken.

According to Mulkeen, the company’s focus on social media began as a cost-effective way to reach deeper into a saturated advertising market.

“There is a lot of competition in advertising in the New York market. We’re competing not only with industry competition, but so many other brands that want to reach the

same audience. That increases our cost, which means we need to be more creative in how we communicate with our existing and prospective customers.”

So instead of relying on radio, newspaper, or direct mail advertising, the company has narrowed its focus on communicating digitally, with a focus on email, website, and social media. Staff members are encouraged to share photos and videos to keep online content current and fresh.

“There is a specific type of customer that we are looking to target. The use of social media within our industry, specifically on Instagram, allows us to speak directly to that audience. Other outlets, such as YouTube, allow us to quickly and effectively communicate a message about a new product or service that we provide,” Mulkeen said.

For example, the company filmed an overview of its Newark facility which included aerial drone footage. This allowed them to instantly share the news with employees, customers and manufacturer partners around the country.

“You really need to make sure that you have a good story to tell,” Mulkeen added. “You can’t make that up in social media. Your audience will see right through it. We have a phenomenal team here. The services and expertise are unmatched. Re-telling those stories on a daily basis makes my job a lot easier, and a lot of people are willing to listen to that story when it’s genuine.”



Drone view of Kuiken Brothers Midland Park location.

Matt Kuiken says the story of Kuiken Brothers has been there for a long time and it just became a matter of empowering employees to share it. “It gets back to our people, our culture, our story, and people engaged in what we do every day. It’s not a protocol, or a structure, for sharing on social media. It’s just that people are rightfully proud of what they do, and encouraged to share their stories.”

The employee pride is easy to see in Kuiken Brothers social media posts. As the company nears 100 delivery vehicles between both residential and commercial projects there are a lot of moving pieces that must fit together perfectly, and when they do, it makes for compelling content.

“We have boom capabilities up to eight stories,” Matt Kuiken said. “In urban settings, those deliveries have to be well-orchestrated. There’s a lot that goes into serving a densely-populated area. We’re on busy streets that often require police oversight and traffic-control around the delivery destination. That stressful and highly-choreographed operation is not for everyone, but we have the best teams in the industry, and routinely get feedback from customers saying, ‘your delivery guys are unbelievable.’”

PEOPLE-FOCUSED

All nine Kuiken Brothers locations serve customers “through an integrated approach to market,” Matt Kuiken said. “It’s about getting the right product to the right place at the right time, and we have resources throughout the metropolitan market to get that done right, every day.”

Doug Kuiken echoed that sentiment, adding that “It’s all for one and one for all.” His philosophy is based on seven words that all start with the letter P, he added. “It’s about our people, planning, product, performance, passion, professionalism, and profitability. It’s all important. Culturally, we’ve been taught from the beginning to work hard, fly right, and do it all with integrity.”

“PROFIT IS NOT A DIRTY WORD. IT’S WHAT YOU NEED TO INVEST IN YOUR COMPANY, INVEST IN YOUR PEOPLE AND YOUR COMMUNITY. YOU NEED TO PLAN FOR PROFIT AND WORK TOWARD PROFIT. EVERY YEAR, THAT’S INCREASINGLY MORE CHALLENGING AS THE WORLD EVOLVES.”

— DOUG KUIKEN

He added that reinvestment in community is an ultimate goal. “Profit is not a dirty word. It’s what you need to invest in your company, invest in your people and your community. You need to plan for profit and work toward profit. Every year, that’s increasingly more challenging as the world evolves. The company looks strategically to the future and tries to determine what the outlook will be in three to five years and then determine the moves we’ll make to be successful there.”

But ultimately, he said, “This business doesn’t run itself, it’s all about good people.”

Matt Kuiken agrees. “Our people are our biggest competitive advantage. We continue to invest in education, training, recruitment, and retention. From comprehensive employment benefits to our commitment to safety and employee enrichment, we are 100% focused on our people.” ■

GET TO KNOW KUIKEN BROTHERS

FOUNDED:	1912
OWNERSHIP:	FAMILY
LOCATIONS:	NINE
EMPLOYEES:	320 CERTAINTED
SALES SOFTWARE:	EPICOR BISTRACK
PURCHASING GROUP/CO-OP:	LMC
TOP THREE BRANDS SOLD:	(RESIDENTIAL) ANDERSEN WINDOWS BOISE CASCADE EWP WEYERHAEUSER (COMMERCIAL) CERTAINTED CLARKDIETRICH NATIONAL GYPSUM



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