



## North American Hardware and Paint Association

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### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## Local Entrepreneur Receives 2023 Young Retailer of the Year Award

**INDIANAPOLIS**—Austin Diehl, director of retail sales at Randy's Hardware in Virginia, was recently named one of the independent home improvement industry's 2023 Young Retailer of the Year honorees by the North American Hardware and Paint Association (NHPA).

The Young Retailer of the Year program, now in its 27th year, identifies and promotes the next generation of aspiring independent home improvement, paint and decorating retailers. It recognizes individual achievement by industry retailers age 35 and younger throughout the U.S. and Canada. Honorees are chosen based on a number of criteria, including professional milestones, community engagement, continuing hardware industry education and extracurricular activities.

Sponsors of the 2023 Young Retailer of the Year program include American Hardware and Lumber Insurance (AHLI), Arrow Fastener, Intertape Polymer Group (IPG), Midwest Fastener, Pony Jorgensen, PPG, STIHL and The Wooster Brush Company.

Austin first worked at Best Buy, where he discovered his passion for business, and quickly rose through the ranks. Along the way, he earned a reputation as a talented leader, and also as someone gifted in shaping and mentoring other leaders in the company. That's when Christian Herrick, CEO of Randy's Hardware and a 2016 Young Retailer of the Year honoree, came calling. In 2016, Christian recruited Austin for the store manager position at the Timberville location of Randy's Hardware.

Austin was a quick study and wasted no time in putting his newfound knowledge—along with his retail expertise and leadership skills—to use. During his first year as store manager, he focused on merchandising updates throughout the store. He went through the entire floor, rearranging departments in a layout that made sense for customers as they searched for products.

As store manager, Austin developed a culture at Timberville that emphasized customer service along with strategic selling practices aimed to increase their average ticket. Austin trained his team to be knowledgeable on the products they sell and showed them how to better serve their customers without becoming overbearing.



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In 2018, Austin took on one of his biggest challenges, developing a labor budget to control unnecessary spending. When Austin first started as store manager, Christian told Austin labor costs were more than they should have been because they were scheduling the same way they had for years. Austin brought an analytical focus to identify peak times for both store traffic and sales, allowing him to assign staff efficiently. Austin's analytical approach to Timberville's labor budget delivered excellent results, reducing their labor expense by 7.9%. Those savings went straight to Randy's bottom line, and Austin's labor budget quickly became standard practice at all locations.

When Randy's bought another hardware store in nearby Mount Jackson at the beginning of 2019, the company needed someone to oversee operations at a higher level to ensure success. Christian promoted Austin to director of retail operations for all three Randy's Hardware locations.

When the pandemic hit in March 2020, Austin was an established member of the company's executive team and helped to tackle the pandemic head-on. His first priority was to keep customers and employees safe. Under Austin's leadership, Randy's Hardware was one of the first retailers in the region to put up plexiglass shields at checkout counters and offer curbside service.

2020 had much more in store than just the pandemic. Randy's Hardware opened its fourth store in Ruckersville, Virginia, that same year. While Austin served in a support role for the Mount Jackson location, he was involved in every aspect of Ruckersville from the start. He helped search for a suitable location, planned store inventory, built the store fixture layout, created a headcount that corresponded to projected sales and hired new staff for the new business.

In 2021, the Ruckersville location was Austin's main focus. He helped run the store in the early days so the manager and assistant manager could emulate what he was doing. As the year went on, Austin developed the store's leadership team, and he was able to transition the daily tasks to them while he continued to coach them on management techniques. Austin's attention to detail, data analysis and emphasis on leadership and service put Randy's in a profitable position. With a great team and processes in place, they were poised for a great year in 2022.

However, at 2:30 a.m. on Saturday, Feb. 26, 2022, Austin was awakened by a message from the Mount Jackson manager: The store was on fire and the fire department was on the scene, but there was nothing they could do. The store was a complete loss.

This didn't stop Austin's determination to bring back the Mount Jackson store, this time even better than before. Austin's management of company operations allowed the Mount Jackson team to have the store back up and running at full strength in record time—barely 100 days after the store went up in flames. Randy's reopened in Mount Jackson in June 2022.



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The successful reopening of the Mount Jackson location illustrates the strengths Austin brings to the table. His brilliance shines in his unglamorous data analysis that keeps Randy's Hardware stores profitable, and his influence is reflected in his leadership mentoring and culture-building across all of locations.

"Being chosen as a Young Retailer of the Year is a high honor. Each year, manufacturers, retailers and wholesalers in the industry join us in celebrating the honorees' contributions to their communities and the industry," says Scott Wright, executive director of advanced retail education programs for NHPA. "Austin exemplifies the dedication and innovation that keep our industry growing."

For more information on the Young Retailer of the Year awards program, honorees and more, visit [YourNHPA.org/yroty](http://YourNHPA.org/yroty).

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### About the North American Hardware and Paint Association

Founded in 1900 by a group of retailers, NHPA is a not-for-profit trade association whose mission is to help home improvement, paint and decorating outlets in the U.S. and Canada become better and more profitable retailers. Governed by a board of independent hardware and paint retailers, NHPA fulfills its mission by providing how-to management resources, product discovery, training programs and networking opportunities for the industry it serves. Learn more at [YourNHPA.org](http://YourNHPA.org).

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