



North American Hardware and Paint Association

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Local Entrepreneur Receives 2023 Young Retailer of the Year Award

INDIANAPOLIS—Michael Gleason Jr., assistant general manager and head purchaser of Gleco Paint in Mount Pocono, Pennsylvania, 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.

With a desire for efficiency and a willingness to look outside the box for solutions, Michael has made big impacts at Gleco Paints through the implementation of several technologies. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, he led the shift in the company's e-commerce strategies, which improved sales and engagement in an era of contactless service.

"Our digital presence has seen a huge increase," he says. "A third of our internet traffic now is customers who are looking for products or services we offer without directly searching for Gleco Paint, which is something we never had before our e-commerce initiative."

Michael also upgraded the operation's digital capabilities in each store. He added iPads and automated smart lightbulbs that turn on whenever the tablets receive an order notification. The lightbulbs alert employees so an order never gets missed. Along with adding this technology to each of the operation's locations, Michael has also helped several other retailers add the same system to their businesses.



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Other processes Michael has implemented include radio frequency gun capabilities, automatic tint systems and store electronic billboards. He was featured in *Paint & Decorating Retailer* magazine, where he shared how his technology strategies have fueled growth at Gleco Paint.

Another area where Michael has led the charge for Gleco Paint is purchasing. He's been instrumental in changing the company's philosophy on purchasing and has added technology and precise reporting that have allowed the business to forecast needed inventory more effectively. Gleco Paint previously used a forecast of two to four months to make purchases, but now makes purchases anywhere from four months to a year out.

"These strategies have proven invaluable to the business in a world of supply shortages," he says. "Along with far greater accuracy and ease of producing orders, we are able to take better advantage of buying promotions, which increases margin and profit at the company level. It also gives us the ability to have stock in our stores while competitors struggle in the current landscape."

His education at a Jesuit high school emphasized the importance of community service for Michael, and he strives to stay involved in the community and give back as often as he can. One of the most impactful ways he has contributed was when he chaperoned a service trip with his high school alma mater. In 2019, he and four other chaperones accompanied 30 high school students to South Carolina to work with Habitat for Humanity. While the trips were canceled the last few years because of the pandemic, Michael hopes to take part in them again.

"We taught these young adults how to work on a construction site and led nightly reflections on spirituality and the importance of living for others," Michael says. "My main role on the job site was teaching the students how to paint a home, and I hope I positively affected the lives of those young adults in my community."

Michael also connects with the operation's customers through various events. Each year, the company hosts three contractor shows that bring in 100 to 200 customers at each event. Along with planning and confirming the exhibiting vendors, Michael cooks breakfast for every attendee at the event.

"My crowning achievement has been cooking a true steak and egg breakfast for the last two years, which has become a major talking point and has been a large draw at the events," he says. "While cooking, I'll talk with customers to engage them about their businesses and grow relationships."

Never wanting to rest on his laurels, Michael strives to grow and continue to learn as much as he can and is currently enrolled in leadership courses at NHPA. From very early on in his career, he has shadowed his father, who is the current owner of the business. Michael also attends industry events, including ALLPRO shows, where he takes part in educational sessions and networks with other retailers.



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“Networking at the ALLPRO shows has proven invaluable,” he says. “Talking to industry leaders and successful business owners at such a young age has provided me with a real direction and attainable path for continued success in this industry.”

Michael is quick to credit the team at Gleco Paint who challenge him and have been a cornerstone of his development in the industry.

“Being in a family business, some of the people who have taught me the fine details of the industry also were there years ago when I was just learning my multiplication tables,” he says. “Today, working side by side with everyone in the company continues to push me to be the best version of myself. I truly consider myself a reflection of the great team we have at Gleco.”

“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. “Michael 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.

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.

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