



## North American Hardware and Paint Association

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### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## Local Entrepreneur Receives 2024 Young Retailer of the Year Award

INDIANAPOLIS—Alex Ziegenbein, owner of Gretna Ace Hardware in Gretna, Nebraska, was recently named one of the independent home improvement industry's 2024 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 28th 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 2024 Young Retailer of the Year program include: American Hardware and Lumber Insurance (AHLI), Arrow Fastener, Intertape Polymer Group (IPG), Midwest Fastener, Pony Jorgensen, PPG and The Wooster Brush Company.

"The Young Retailer of the Year program highlights the bright future of the independent channel," says Scott Wright, executive director of advanced retail education programs for NHPA. "It is a privilege to recognize these outstanding young retailers who are making positive impacts in their operations and communities."

With a willingness to take risks and a grace-filled heart, at the age of 24 Alex left his role as a salesman for a farm machinery magazine and embarked on his career in home improvement. His grandfather, Bill Sapp, who owned Sapp Brothers Truck Stop, had a vacant building to fill and saw the need for a hardware store in the fastest growing community in Nebraska. Bill tapped Alex to be his store manager, and after some prayer, he agreed, spending the summer remodeling the vacant building and attending the Ace New Owners Academy.

In January 2014, Alex and his wife Ashley opened Gretna Ace Hardware and brought on five employees, three of whom are still with the company. By year three, the 4,500-square-foot store met its ten-year goal of \$1.7 million in sales. Knowing the Gretna community had outgrown its hardware store, Alex began looking to expand in 2020, and in September 2022, moved into a 20,000-square-foot former grocery store. After a full remodel of this new space, the Gretna location saw a 90% increase in sales from 2021 to 2023.

In 2018, Alex opened up a 12,000-square-foot ground-up store in Springfield, Nebraska. By the third year, that store marked Year 10 sales, pulling in \$1.93 million. In 2023, both stores combined had sales of \$6.1 million.

With a sixth sense for products, Alex noticed both stores' communities lacked a grilling destination with expert help and knowledge. He was not only one of the first Ace stores to adopt the reset for a large grilling display, but went even further to add other local barbecue sauces and spices and trained an employee from each store to be the designated grilling expert.



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As his operation expands, Alex himself is also growing by embracing lifelong learning through industry workshops, seminars, webinars and leadership conferences and sharing the best of his learning with his team. He is continually listening to leadership podcasts such as Entleadership to glean new best practices. Alex and his team take part in regular vendor training and educational courses through his wholesaler, and his goal is to offer a minimum of 15 hours of training per employee each month.

Alex possesses a strong commitment to his core values—compassion for others, generosity, responsibility, integrity—which shine through in his professional dealings and his involvement with the community. He has a very genuine sense of responsibility for his family, his employees whom he views as extended family members and his community and the role of his business within the community. At both stores, he cultivates an encouraging and fun environment because he believes if the employees are positive the customers can sense it and will enjoy shopping at the store.

He is a supporter of Youth for Christ in the Greater Omaha area, hosts round-up fundraisers in the stores, offers an angel tree at the Springfield store at Christmas and donates to the local schools, sports teams and other nonprofits. He also works with the local schools to employ high schoolers, training them up to continue through life with successful work ethic and skills. Alex is also an active member of the Local Big Red Ace Group (BRAG) Nebraska retailer group.

With an eye to the future, Alex's drive to always be changing with retail, staying up to date with new emerging products and increasing his business profits never wanes or slows. Some of his goals and dreams include becoming "The Supply Place" for both communities, better serving his business customers and increasing his relationships with other small businesses in his communities.

Alex also knows that in order to provide his customers with excellent service and product, his operation needs to be on its "Ace" game, having training, trials and a business champion to manage and develop these accounts. He has plans to open a third store and wants to increase the operation's giving.

"Being one of 2024 Young Retailer of the Year honorees is truly a blessing, one that would not have been possible without the faith, assistance and guidance of so many people," Alex says. "This award gives me assurance that we are doing something right and confidence that we can do so much more. I am delighted to bring this award back and share it with my wife and my teams because without them and their continued effort to improve daily, we would never be able to serve our community and continue to grow."

The 2024 Young Retailer of the Year honorees will be recognized in a ceremony at the 2024 Independent Home Improvement Conference in Marco Island, Florida, on Aug. 28. 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).