



North American Hardware and Paint Association

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Local Entrepreneur Receives 2024 Young Retailer of the Year Award

INDIANAPOLIS—Lee Heinrich, owner of H&R Hardware and Lumber in Hohenwald, Tennessee, 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 and paint and decorating retailers. It recognizes individual achievement by industry retailers age 35 and younger throughout the U.S. and Canada. Selected from three separate retail categories, 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 an independent spirit and the determination to revitalize a local hardware store, Lee Heinrich purchased H&R Hardware in Hohenwald, Tennessee, in 2017.

He began working at the store in 2014 after leaving Nashville to seek a quieter lifestyle and a deeper connection to the community. Lee teamed up with his mother, Lena Rayfield, to acquire the store, rebranding it as H&R Hardware to reflect both of their last names. Under Heinrich's leadership, the store experienced a surge in sales, with a 50% increase in the first 18 months and a remarkable 72% growth in 2022.



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“I wanted to change the dynamic of the store and increase employee-to-customer contact,” Lee says. “We quadrupled the revenue pretty quickly.”

All of the changes Lee implemented in the 8,100-square-foot store had the goal of increasing customer service. Lee and Lena revamped the store with a vintage vibe that is both warm and welcoming. They then increased the store’s inventory from \$300,000 to \$1.4 million, adding new categories such as grilling and a gift and housewares department.

“We took the money we made in the first two or three years and reinvested it back into inventory and improvements on the building,” Lee says.

Building a business-to-business sales program from the ground up was another big change that resulted in a 95% increase in commercial sales in five years and the expansion of the department from a small section in the store to a 7,200-square-foot warehouse. Lee created a maintenance, repair and operations system that supplies large manufacturing facilities, city and county governments and school systems.

The store’s best-selling categories are plumbing, paint and hand tools. From 2017 to 2019, H&R Hardware was the No. 1 paint dealer in the region and is currently the No. 1 Benjamin Moore paint store in the region.

As a result of Lee and Lena’s hard work, the business won several area awards from the Lewis County Herald, including Best Customer Service, Best Hardware Store, Best Paint Store, Best Building Supply, Friendliest Staff and Best Entrepreneur.

Lee plans to grow the lawn and garden and electrical categories in the future and is opening a greenhouse later this year. To keep the store’s product selection fresh, Lee regularly attends industry trade shows and wholesaler markets for product discovery and relies on vendor reps to keep him informed about the latest offerings. When traveling out of town, he enjoys stopping by local stores to see how they do business.

“It is neat to go into other hardware stores and meet the owners,” Lee says. “They are a font of knowledge—they’ve seen everything this business has been through.”

Lee is continually improving himself, engaging with training from the North American Hardware and Paint Association and taking part in vendor training.

Involvement in the community is high on Lee’s priority list. He served on a vocational and technical education advisory committee for the Lewis County Board of Education, and the store hires students from Lewis County High School’s vocational technical program to work



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afternoons, weekends and summers. Lee served on the Lewis County Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors and supports the Davis House Child Advocacy Center. The store also hosts a customer cookout each year and sponsors local teams and organizations.

“We like to do business with people who do business with us,” Lee says. “We know all of this is a gift, and we like to give back and better the community.”

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 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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