



North American Hardware and Paint Association

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Local Entrepreneur Receives 2026 Young Retailer of the Year Award

INDIANAPOLIS, May 8, 2026—Jeff Kuenning, co-owner of Western Ohio True Value in Minster, Ohio, was recently named one of the independent home improvement industry's 2026 Young Retailer of the Year honorees by the North American Hardware and Paint Association (NHPA).

This year marks 30 years of the Young Retailer of the Year program, which 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, and fall into one of three categories: multistore, under \$3 million sales volume and over \$3 million sales volume.

Sponsors of the 2026 Young Retailer of the Year program include: American Hardware and Lumber Insurance (AHLI), ECI Software Solutions, Midwest Fastener and The Wooster Brush Company.

Cody Goeppner, NHPA director of education and training and 2020 Young Retailer of the Year honoree, says the recognition was a turning point for him as it highlighted the hard work he had poured into his career and introduced him to a broader community of passionate, forward-thinking retailers.

"As someone who grew up in my family's hardware store and spent years as a retailer myself, I know firsthand how much heart, grit and innovation it takes to succeed in this industry," Goeppner says. "It truly is full circle and an incredible honor for me to support and celebrate the next generation of leaders. This program shines a spotlight on the people who are shaping the future of independent retail, and based on this year's class, the future is bright."

In 1953, Jeff's grandparents purchased the local hardware store in a small downtown location in New Bremen and today the operation has expanded to four locations, each with a deliberate commitment to tailoring each store to the realities of its market.

When Jeff and his brothers were old enough to work, they started at the bottom by loading trucks, cleaning the floors, picking up trash and collecting cardboard and other essentials. In 2006, Jeff was officially scheduled at age 12 into what he calls the "grunt" role, which ensured the existing team saw the next generation earning credibility rather than inheriting it, and it built in Jeff a floor-level understanding of every process that later mattered when he was responsible for leading people.

From there, Jeff progressed naturally through counter roles and operational responsibilities. In late 2020, Jeff stepped away from the family business and joined Express Employment Professionals as an outside sales representative, building a disciplined B2B routine under high activity expectations. He learned to manage a



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schedule, build a funnel, handle rejection and maintain consistent follow-up, all skills that translate directly into modern pro development for independent retail.

In early 2022, Jeff returned full-time to the family business without hesitation, which coincided with a transition in the family's leadership structure following the passing of Jeff's father. Jeff's ability to return, reconcile family dynamics and recommit to a shared standard of excellence is a career milestone that does not show up on a balance sheet but it directly influences performance, stability and long-term succession.

If Jeff has a signature leadership contribution to Western Ohio True Value, it is his ability to transform a category into a destination, seen in his creation of the Milwaukee Destination Center in the Minster location, where he expanded 84 linear feet to 200 linear feet with a 1,066-square-foot show floor.

While Jeff's Milwaukee leadership is the most visible growth platform, his contribution to the operation extends beyond tools. In a multistore environment, it's also his responsibility for systems, standards and execution. Jeff is responsible for the company's IT infrastructure across all four stores, including networking, point-of-sale hardware, printers, phones and the decisions that determine the business's technology direction. Under Jeff's technology oversight, the operation has maintained and expanded its e-commerce capabilities, delivering steady online ordering activity.

Jeff's strongest operational results are paired with a leadership philosophy that builds capability around him rather than creating dependency on a single expert. He invests in training so that, when he is out developing accounts or managing strategic projects, the department still performs with confidence and professionalism. Jeff's approach to learning is pragmatic. He invests in education when it will make customers better served, associates more confident and the business more competitive.

To grow professionally and personally, Jeff serves as an NHPA Ambassador, participating in monthly calls and ongoing discussion topics that keep him connected to the broader independent channel and its best practices. He also makes use of informal learning opportunities that many retailers overlook like relationships with local business leaders in a long-running community golf league, where conversations naturally revolve around business trends, operational challenges and opportunities in the region.

Jeff's community involvement plays out in three practical ways. He takes on personal leadership roles that require real commitment; he personally champions meaningful store-led giving when the need is significant; and he reinforces the local business ecosystem through daily service helping contractors, families and organizations keep essential work moving by solving problems, not just selling products. His most visible community role today is as a volunteer high school basketball coach. He is also a member of the tech team at Faith Alliance Church, supporting audio and livestream operations.

Representing the next generation of independent retail leadership in a way that is both measurable and deeply human, Jeff's work contributes to the long-term sustainability of the business. He grew up in the realities of the business, earned credibility on the floor and developed the discipline to do what customers need when they need it.

The 2026 Young Retailer of the Year honorees will be recognized as part of the Independent Awards Gala at the 2026 Independent Home Improvement Conference in Orlando on July 29. For more information on the Young Retailer of the Year awards program, honorees and more, visit YourNHPA.org/yroty.