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Local Entrepreneur Receives 2025 Young Retailer of the Year Award

INDIANAPOLIS, May 8, 2026—Taylor Cole, retail development and marketing support for Cole's Hardware with 12 locations in central Pennsylvania, 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."

Now part of the senior leadership team at Cole's Hardware, Taylor started his career at the operation as a teenager in 2005, working as a part-time sales associate, sorting product and stocking shelves. He would hold this role all through his time at Danville High School and Susquehanna University. Through his studies at Susquehanna University, he attended the Sigmund Weis School of Business, which included a semester abroad in London. He was a member and captain of both the Danville and Susquehanna swimming teams, and in 2013, he earned the Heart of a Champion Award for his leadership on the Susquehanna swimming team.

Taylor represents the fifth generation of leadership at Cole's Hardware, which has been serving central Pennsylvania since 1883. But Taylor is not simply preserving a legacy—he is redefining it. In the past several years, Taylor has led one of the most significant modernization efforts in the company's 140-plus year history. Taylor has proven he is not just a store operator; he is a retail architect.

Taylor was instrumental in transitioning Cole's Hardware from legacy systems to a fully integrated enterprise platform. This was not a passive software adoption but a cultural shift led by Taylor that created operational



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efficiencies, unified retail and e-commerce under one platform and positioned Cole's for scalable growth. Taylor is also pioneering the integration of AI into Cole's operations that will enable leadership to analyze live business data and generate actionable insights to support faster, smarter decision-making across merchandising, inventory, customer and financial performance.

Taylor is leading the implementation of a register queue program, transitioning Cole's away from traditional fixed checkouts to a more fluid retail transaction model. During the pilot, Cole's has already achieved increased average ticket, higher transaction counts on targeted impulse items and improved customer flow and security.

Taylor is redefining Cole's future with a new vision and mission statements, seven strategic pillars and four brand footers. Taylor facilitated alignment across senior leadership and store managers, ensuring that each initiative translated into executable action. The strategic plan also stays true to the company's vision—to be the preferred partner for every project, every community and every generation—and mission to provide trusted services and valued solutions for every customer.

Taylor's leadership growth has been intentional and continuous. He is a graduate of the NHPA Foundations of Leadership program and Leadership Susquehanna Valley. Taylor serves on the Board of Directors for Leadership Susquehanna Valley, has taken advanced leadership coursework through Penn State and participates in ongoing engagement in retail education programs.

With an understanding that independent retail succeeds only when its community thrives, in 2024, Taylor launched the Community Bag Sale, benefiting local YMCA and swimming center's Learn to Swim programs. This initiative honored the legacy of his grandfather, funded swimming lessons for local children, strengthened Cole's identity as a community-first retailer and reinforced generational values through modern action. Taylor also actively participates in community events, charitable initiatives and local leadership efforts—not as a sponsor, but as a participant.

Taylor's leadership style is inclusive, approachable and collaborative. He fosters environments where store managers feel ownership, front-line employees feel heard and strategic ideas are shared openly. The annual Cole's Family Picnic—where all stores close early—reflects this commitment to people-first leadership.

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.

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