

Ola Yoder

CEO,
Kountry Wood Products

Woodworking has played an integral role in Ola Yoder's life for close to half a century. Yet surprisingly, it wasn't necessarily the career he envisioned growing up.

"I never really thought one way or the other until I got into it," said the Kountry Wood Products CEO. "Once I did, I always had a vision of doing production, high-volume woodworking."

Yoder spent almost 30 years working in the cabinet and wood shops of a local mobile home and RV manufacturers before he and a former partner started Kountry Wood Products in 1998. They produced picture and mirror frames for major retail chains, when a customer request for cabinetry took them in another direction. Before long, they were producing kitchen cabinetry under the Kountry Wood name.

The company has grown significantly in 20 years, from building products in Yoder's barn, to producing an estimated 6,000 cabinets daily — approximately 1.4 million a year — from a combined manufacturing space of 227,000 square feet.

A lean manufacturer, Kountry Wood performs panel sizing, finishing and other operations in-house, while outsourcing rough mill from domestic producers.

Yoder added he is always looking for ways to improve and grow the company.



On Sept. 18, Kountry Wood Products hosted 350 top customers, vendors, community leaders and special guests at its brand-new event center, Sammlung Platz ("Gathering Place" in German). The evening consisted of dinner, award presentations, and musical entertainment. CEO Ola Yoder (at podium) presided over the award presentations.



Plans include modernizing the Wabash plant, "but the main goal is just to keep on doing what we're doing, and make changes as we go along."

It's a strategy that has worked well, with achievements that include a listing in the 50 Indiana Companies to Watch in 2008. Kountry Wood, with the inclusion of Borkholder Furniture which Yoder acquired in 2010, is also ranked in the FDMC 300.

Yoder credits his management team, employees, and customer base for the success. "Just having good people all around — that's one of the best achievements," he noted.

Yoder's appreciation for his employees, and their families, is evident. The company offers an extensive benefits package includ-

ing a generous health insurance program that covers no co-pay/no-charge office visits, labs, immunizations and generic prescriptions in addition to a wellness program.

"That's one of our great accomplishments."

Another is community service, for organization including Big Brothers & Big Sisters, and the Boys & Girls Club of Napanee. Reflective of his Amish heritage, Yoder said, "We're very much a believer in helping people out, not only in our local community but also abroad too."

In his free time Yoder enjoys traveling, meeting with friends and other woodworkers, and spending time with his family, including his children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

QUICK GLIMPSE

- Education: I never went to college, but I've read a lot of management books and attended many seminars.
- Number of years at the company: 20
- Number of years in the industry: Approximately 50
- Word that best describes you: Determined
- Business mantra: Ship on time and ship complete, with good quality and at a fair price
- Best advice: Be honest and have integrity. Do what you say and don't go out there and blow a bunch of smoke. And the next thing is to be humble and don't blow your own horn.
- Who have you tried to emulate? Jim Shea inspired me to do a lot of different things in business. He gave me a job, gave me experience. And also Clarence Witsken. He was my mentor when I started my business.