

Forging Business Relationships

Industry Segments Gather For 17th Annual Hardware Conference

Retailers, distributors and manufacturers found the communication channels open during the 17th annual Hardware Conference Sept. 9-11 in Marco Island, Fla.

The annual conference continues to widen its appeal and attract retailers from across the country. This year, retail attendees included Rocco Falcone of the Springfield, Mass.-based Rocky's Ace Hardware, which has 25 stores in Massachusetts, Rhode Island and New Hampshire. Michel Chenier from Embrun, Ontario, Canada's multi-unit Embrun Cooperative, also attended, as did Tom Pitkin of Dale City, Va.-based Pitkin's Home Center.

Pitkin, who has been attending the conference for several years, said the event is particularly beneficial to him in training and motivating team members at his three stores. "Talking to the vendors provides us with a great training tool for employees," he said.

Rebuilding was a recurring theme for the 550 conference attendees as well. Retailers spoke about the rebuilding process impacting stores across the country damaged by hurricanes, fires and other disasters. Bill Zeithammer of Isles Do it Best Hardware led a discussion about how he and his family coped with the aftermath of Hurricane Charley, which destroyed his store last year. He gave retailers suggestions about how to proactively prepare for disasters, including keeping records and

dealing with insurance companies throughout the year.

North American Retail Hardware Association President Tom Green of Mayer's Hardware in Rochester, N.Y., attended the conference and said he enjoyed mingling with the wide variety of store owners and vendors. "The conference format and open dialogue sessions are ideal for information exchange," Green said.

Tom Chasteen, who owns Tavernier (Fla.) Ace Hardware and co-directs the conference with his wife Dale, said

attending retailers represented Ace Hardware, Do it Best, Orgill and True Value.

Topics covered in the open dialogue sessions included promoting new products, retail pricing strategies, national brands versus private labels, in-store demonstrations, advertising, working with vendor reps and training employees.

"Retailers seemed to be very focused on product presentation in their stores and category management for maximizing space and sales per square foot," said Chasteen. "They mentioned size of packaging and the importance of graphics in packaging."

Mike O'Hara of O'Hara True Value in Ottumwa, Iowa, said he enjoyed the opportunity to preview new products and interact with the vendors.

Honorees for the 2005 conference included a Beacon Award to the Hayes family of Bell, Fla.-based Gilchrist Do it Best Building Supply; and Lifetime Achievement Awards to Doug Mathews of Marco True Value in Marco Island, Fla., and Saralea Freeman of Ace Hardware Corp., who is retiring after 37 years with the co-op.

Event sponsors for 2005 included the North American Retail Hardware Association, 3M, KST Coatings, Activant Solutions, Irwin, CooperTools, Damp Rid, Duracell Batteries, H.D. Hudson Mfg., Hillman Group, Krylon, Miami Children's Hospital Foundation, Minwax, Poms and Associates, Robert Bosch Tool Corp., Toolbox Marketing and Weber Stephens Products.



Bill Zeithammer of Isles Do it Best Hardware in Punta Gorda, Fla., led a standing-room-only discussion about how he and his family coped with the aftermath of Hurricane Charley, which decimated his store last year.



Marilyn and Bruce Johnson of Johnson's Ace Hardware in South Carolina enjoyed attending this year's Hardware Conference in Marco Island, Fla.