

FAMILY'S LUMBERYARD BUILT TO LAST

Expansion, hard work get business through 75 years

SMALL BUSINESS Q&A

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Special to Newsday

Like his father, Joe Sider, 58, began working as a teenager in the family business, which is celebrating its 75th anniversary this year. But that wasn't his original plan.

It was only after he quit college after two years, and Frank Sider, now 81, sought his help, that Joe developed the commitment to the lumberyard started by his namesake grandfather.

"I started working for my dad when I was 13. Honestly, I never really liked it that much because it was very hard work. I wasn't thinking about the work ethic that I was learning at the time," said Joe, now general manager of Sider Lumber & Supply Co. in Nesconset. "I left for college in 1983, but two years later I came home, and my father had the foresight to think that this business needs a computer system, so that's what I did."

In 1948, founder Joseph Sider opened a small homeowner lumberyard on a three-quarter-acre location. He died five years later, and his wife, Frieda, took over. But in 1961, she asked her son Frank to help save the business.

"His mother had a business background, but was no match for unscrupulous salesmen and customers who took advantage of her," said Frank's wife, Sandy Sider, 80. "Frank had worked summers since he was 14 and always saw himself as being an integral part of the lumber business."

Frank said the customers and salespeople knew him as a kid but learned to respect his initiative and hard work as an adult. The business succeeded, adjusting to industry changes, including the advent of big-box stores that knocked out some competitors.

Joe took sales classes and his role — and the business — grew from there. In 2010, Frank and Sandy, already in their 60s,



Sandy and Frank Sider rebuilt Sider Lumber & Supply Co. at a larger location in Nesconset in 2010.

AT A GLANCE

Sider Lumber & Supply Co., Nesconset

What it sells: Home building materials

Leadership: President, Frank Sider; vice president, Sandy Sider; general manager/treasurer, Joe Sider

Annual Sales: Approximately \$25 million

Employees: 35

Founded: 1948

took out a mortgage to buy a 4½-acre lot in Nesconset and build a state-of-the-art lumberyard with a 10,000-square-foot showroom.

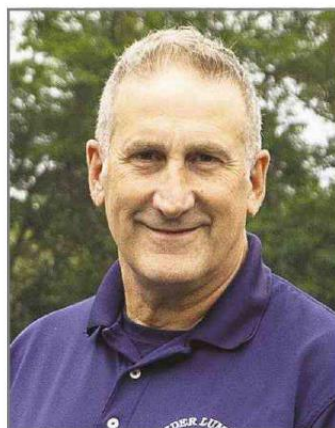
Today, the company's customer core is high-end home improvement contractors and custom home builders.

Reflecting on the decision to work with his father 38 years ago, Joe said, "I was lucky that he had confidence in me."

The Siders spoke to Newsday recently; responses have been edited for space and clarity.

How did you bring the business up to date?

Sider was one of the first lum-



General manager and treasurer Joe Sider, grandson of the lumberyard's founder.

beryards on Long Island to be computerized. That made all the difference for inventory control, accounts receivable, accounts payable. "And the experience changed me, giving me the spirit of wanting the business to succeed," said Joe.

What's your niche?

Our focus is on service. We're known as a lumberyard that will go to the ends of the Earth to fill an order. If you need it, we'll find it for you and will supply it for you.

How did you acquire the capital you needed?

Frank said he initially used his salary to buy shares from his mother. "But in 1978 there was a tremendous ice storm on Long Island that damaged our buildings and equipment. Sandy spent a whole year filling out forms to get an SBA [Small Business Administration] loan, which we got and that really helped us take a step ahead. We repaired our sheds, bought a new forklift and other equipment and got new inventory."

What were your biggest recent challenges?

COVID was difficult. Material was harder to get. Our vendors did a pretty decent job. Then sales prices dropped quite a bit because we had some expensive inventory. With our history of being loyal to our vendors and paying our bills on time, we did OK.

What about staffing?

Our biggest issue is manpower. [Finding] the quality of people that want to do what we do, like salesmen or work in the yard, makes it very difficult. But we also

have two people who have been here almost 30 years.

What's the biggest mistake you made along the way?

We probably didn't move quick enough to our larger site. It was a huge undertaking financially and then to even find the right location so that we wouldn't lose our customer base. We moved less than a mile away. It worked out.

How do you get your customers?

We have six outside sales reps. We have a lot of customers that have been with us 20 to 30 years. But a lot of it is word-of-mouth through other contractors, carpenters and builders, so we try to network through that.

How many hours do you work a week?

"That's one of the drawbacks working for us. Our employees work 55 hours and then sometimes they put in overtime. I work roughly 60 hours a week," said Joe.

What's best about owning your own business?

Some of the stuff that we carried 10 years ago, nobody buys anymore because technology has come up with other products. We're always changing and learning about different products, so it does keep it interesting. Frank was the first one on Long Island to bring in pressure-treated lumber, so it's about being intuitive. "And if I want to stop with whatever I'm doing," said Joe, "I spend 45 minutes with a customer going through choices on decking, doors, windows. I enjoy that."

What's your advice for anyone thinking of going into a family business or a very specific business like yours?

Mainly that you have to put in the time. It's definitely a full-time job, especially in the age of computers and cellphones. We're on call 24/7 and our customers are that way, too. Joe said he gives out his cellphone because his customers are doing the same thing. You may think you're the boss, but when your customers need you, you have to be ready.