



Larry Ray

Bring “It” Back

New President Plans for Passion

by Drew Vass

This year’s incoming AMD president is Larry Ray, previous owner/founder and current architectural consultant for GHDC Inc. in Tupelo, Miss. Ray says he’d like to bring excitement back to the millwork industry and help young people recognize the immense opportunities it presents.

A Sunday school teacher in his hometown of Jackson, Tenn., encouraged Ray to get into the business back in 1963 and he attended his first AMD convention in 1976. “It’s been a long time and a different color of hair, in fact,” Ray jokes. “The rest is history.”

Ray has been married for 45 years to his wife, Sandra, and both have been active members in the association. They have three adult children—two sons, Greg and Grant, and a daughter, Heather. “We’re a very close family,” Ray explains.

SHELTER recently had the opportunity to interview Ray and discuss his past, present and immediate future.

Q: What was your first position in the millwork industry?

A: I began as a desk salesman, what we would call customer service today. I quickly transitioned into an outside sales position and I stayed in that for a dozen years or so.

Q: Prior to that, what was your very first job?

A: Well, I was raised on a farm in Western Tennessee, so my first job wasn’t a “job,” but I did everything from planting crops, to painting fences and picking cotton. My first formal job was working in a Kroger grocery store while I was in high school. I learned a great deal there about good customer service.

Q: What would you say you gained from your childhood experiences working on a farm?

A: The one thing I gained from it is that I’m not afraid of hard work. In fact, I would say I thrive on it. I really enjoy working.

Q: If you could have any job in the world, what would that be?

A: The one I’ve got. I have a love for this business. Some people are driven by the pursuit of wealth, or climbing a ladder of success. I enjoy seeing homes built, projects going up and watching our products going into them. I like to see things being created.

Everything in our makeup has to do with how we feel and what’s important to us. The architectural aspect of our products is just something that’s very important to me.

Q: How would you like that passion to serve AMD and the millwork industry?

A: Well, passion must be accompanied by a plan and that’s where AMD comes in. I would like to see more young people passionate about this industry. And there’s a lot for them to be passionate about. Nothing in the building process could be any more rewarding. We deal with the nice things—the windows, doors, mouldings and trim. Those are the nice things that go into a building.

Q: Would you say that young people are being steered away from the millwork business?

A: I don’t think we’ve perhaps done a good enough job selling the industry to our young people. Now, obviously, that’s something that’s going to vary from state to state and from company to company. But I fear that the problem is many young people feel it takes too long to get where they want to be in this industry. It’s not a quick one-year or two-year turn. It’s got to be a life goal.

It’s the responsibility of the managers and leaders in our industry to look beyond just economics and numbers, and take the time to paint visions. I think we all struggle with being visionary and recognizing real opportunity.

Q: How would you suggest AMD and its members go about reaching these young people?

A: It means being active in your local com-

munity. It means buying ads in the local high school annuals and newspapers. It means being active in your local clubs and civic groups—the things that actively make your community better.

If we're going to promote our industry to our young people, we're going to have to do these things and show that we're good corporate citizens and that we're concerned about important issues. We need to have a presence among these individuals.

Q: How do you think the Internet has impacted the millwork business?

A: I think it has done miracles in efficiency, by cutting down on paper flows tremendously. It also has opened up technology that allows us to avoid maintaining large volumes of information locally. You can now use the Internet to access just the information you need and immediately.

Conversely, it has opened up the same information to the consumer and, as a result, put a tremendous amount of pressure on the distributor to stay in touch with the products consumers are looking at.

Q: Do you consider yourself to be Internet-savvy?

A: Oh yes. I use it a great deal, in fact. Many of the high-profile dealers I'm accustomed to working with require that orders be filed electronically. Also, in our offices, we communicate quotes and other communications, even just across the hall, by e-mail and over the Internet.

Q: How do you feel the green movement has and will impact the millwork industry?

A: Initially efforts were focused on sourcing renewable resources. Now we're beginning to see it encompass energy consumption and we're looking further ahead, considering how products impact buildings 20 years from now.

Q: And what role do you foresee AMD playing in this movement?


A: What we've got to address with our members is where this is all headed and what the



impact will be, long-range, for our membership. We need to address how you prepare for being a supplier of goods and services that are green.

I think, whether it be the green movement, the future of millwork or immigration—the bottom line is that AMD members need to be good stewards of everything. We cannot allow ourselves to be the types of companies that take advantage of these situations. We need to be responsible companies.

Q: When you look back, what impact would you like to have had on the association and industry?

A: I would like to see us put the excitement back into millwork. I also would like to say that we made forward strides in promoting our industry. 

Larry Ray would like to see AMD member companies reach out to young people and create excitement for the millwork industry and its new products, as shown above.