



*Marlin Smucker, president of
Sam S. Smucker & Sons, Inc.*

Sam S. Smucker & Sons, Inc. ... Celebrating Its 50th Anniversary

IN 1960, SAM S. SMUCKER LAUNCHED A HOME-IMPROVEMENT BUSINESS. WHILE THE SCOPE OF THE BUSINESS HAS GROWN OVER THE PAST 50 YEARS, ITS BUSINESS PRINCIPLES REMAIN ROOTED IN THE CHRISTIAN VALUES THAT MR. SMUCKER HAS ALWAYS LIVED AND WORKED BY.

Now 82 years old, Sam Smucker can't seem to find a reason to fully retire. "He has to have something to do," says his son and successor, Marlin Smucker, the company's president. On any given day, Sam can be found at the company's Strasburg Pike location, mowing the lawn, puttering around the storage areas or helping with deliveries. Once winter arrives, however, he becomes a snowbird and heads for Florida.

When he opened his business, Smucker concentrated his efforts on roofing, spouting and painting. "He knocked on doors to get work," Marlin explains. And, he sealed the deal not with a comprehensive contract, but a simple handshake. "It was a different time," Marlin notes.

Smucker was also a different kind of businessman in that he grew up Amish. "Dad was from New Holland and Mom was from the Intercourse area," Marlin says. "Smucker" and "Stoltzfoos," you can't get much more Lancaster County than that. Marlin makes sure that I have "Stoltzfoos" spelled properly. According to him, the lesser-known spelling came as a result of "two brothers not getting along." In an effort to set themselves apart from each other, one of the feuding brothers began spelling his last name differently. While his older brother and sister grew up Amish, Marlin did not.

Smucker headquartered his business on a farm along Rockvale Road. In 1968, the painting portion of the business was dropped. In 1976, siding was added and in 1993, replacement windows became an integral part of the business. The opening of a second showroom – in Ephrata – occurred in 1993, as well. Three years ago, the Rockvale Road location was replaced by a modern facility along the Strasburg Pike. "We had outgrown Rockvale Road," Marlin notes. "The new location provides us with much more visibility."

Sam S. Smucker & Sons remains a family-owned business. In addition to Marlin, his brother, Lee, serves as CEO. Their sister, Mary Ann Miller, is the company's secretary and treasurer. And, a third generation is represented by Mary Ann's son, Sheldon, who serves as the company's vice president. Sheldon also heads Smucker Laser Cutting, which is a division of Sam S. Smucker & Sons. "We cut steel or aluminum up to an inch thick," Marlin says of the business, which was launched seven years ago with one machine. Two years ago, a second machine was added.

Marlin has been with the company on a full-time basis since he was 15. "I knew I'd be working for my father, so I didn't see the point in going to school," he explains. "Looking back now, I wish I had gone to high school." As for his own six children, "I don't encourage or discourage them. The choice is theirs to make. Just the other day, my 16 year-old indicated he might be interested in joining the company."

Marlin verifies that the economic downturn seriously impacted the building industry. "We went through recessions in 1980 and 1990, but this one was different. It hit us pretty good," he says. He credits the difference to the fact that prior to the latest recession, the building industry in Lancaster County was booming. The economy could support the many building-related companies that were conducting business in the county. When the economy began its downslide, competition for jobs escalated and bidding became tougher. Smucker found itself competing against companies that were submitting bids that guaranteed no profit margins; the goal was to just keep employees on the job. "I'd see the winning bids and think there's no way," he remarks. To reiterate his point, Marlin shares that he recently found a 20-year-old telephone book. Out of curiosity, he turned to the roofing section of the Yellow Pages. "There was one page of roofing contractors," he reports. "Now there are five or six." Marlin is proud of the fact that his company was awarded the roofing contract for the newly expanded Worship Center, of which he is a member.

In an effort to stay competitive, Marlin says the company had to "adjust and fine tune" its operations. Unfortunately, that included laying off employees. "We've had as many as 70, but right now, we have about 45," he says of the employment situation. "We value our employees," he says, noting that a salesman has been with the company for 35 years, while an office employee has been on the job for 20-plus years. As a way to thank employees for their dedication to the company, those who reach 12 years of service are given an all-expenses-paid trip for them and their families to Disney World. In celebration of the company's milestone anniversary, employees and their families were treated to a day at Hersheypark.

The company has also concentrated its efforts on maintaining a strong relationship with loyal customers. "Eighty percent of our business comes through referrals," Marlin notes. "Customer loyalty is something you can't buy." As a result, the decision was made to forgo taking part in large consumer shows and instead, concentrate on making the expos that are held at its two locations in the spring and fall better than ever. "The expos allow us to talk one-on-one with customers," he notes. In honor of the milestone anniversary, this year's expos featured lots of prizes for those who attended. "We would have liked to do more, but with the economy the way it is, we couldn't," Marlin comments.

Doing the best job possible has always been a tenet by which Sam S. Smucker conducts business. "We always want to do a good, quality job for our customers," Marlin says. "We go the extra mile to meet their expectations. And, we make it our business to treat customers with respect."

The fragile economy has prompted consumers to make their homes as energy efficient as possible. "If you have old windows, you're losing more energy than you think," Marlin points out. Hence, the Federal Tax Credits for Energy Efficiency Program that is slated to end on December 31 has prompted homeowners to invest in new doors and windows. "The program has helped to generate business," Marlin reports. He also notes that today's consumers are more knowledgeable than they were in the past. "They do research through the Internet. A lot of them know enough to make them dangerous," he quips.

In the realm of windows, Marlin predicts that fiberglass is poised to become the up-and-coming material of choice.

"It's stronger than vinyl, has more glass space and will last forever," he notes. "Plus, it can be painted." Currently, the company handles products from Marvin (including its "next generation" Infinity model), Paradigm and Gorell. In order to stay updated on changing technology, Marlin relies on Internet support, attends trade shows and reads trade journals.

As for future expansion, Marlin says that is always a possibility, "but the timing has to be right." ♦

For more information about Sam S. Smucker & Sons, visit www.sssmucker.com.

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