

Craftsmanship, Family Pride Driving Specialty Fabricators To New Heights

Ed Symbouras is a throwback. Pride of craftsmanship matters. Relationships matter. And the importance of having family surrounding him matters very much.

As the president and CEO of Specialty Fabricators, the Wrightstown, NJ-based fixtures and equipment company, Symbouras' story captures the essence of entrepreneurial success that has always been an important piece of the grocery industry.

Born and raised in West New York, NJ, Ed turned down track scholarships from Villanova and Montclair State to join the Army. Trained as a carpenter, part of his tour of duty found him stationed at Fort Dix. Upon his discharge, he answered an ad from Modern Equipment, which was looking for a draftsman and cabinet maker.

In 1995, Edward and wife Patricia hung out their shingle and Specialty Fabricators was born. For the first year, company headquarters were located in a building adjacent to Symbouras' house in Ocean County and most of what was produced were oyster bars and bread shelving.

In 1996, as the business continued to grow, the Symbouras' relocated their headquarters to Wrightstown (ironically, only five miles from Fort Dix). One of the company's biggest breaks came when Specialty Fabricators was recommended to several ShopRite members who were looking for more customized equipment as their "fresh" businesses expanded. An example of this movement was executed by developing merchandising solutions for visionary Richard Saker (CEO, Saker ShopRites).

As Specialty Fabricators also grew both in sales and geography, Ed added more designers and craftsman to his roster and the firm began to develop more customized fixtures to meet the needs of his customers, many of whom were expanding their prepared foods businesses.

While Ed continues to lead the Specialty Fabricators' day-to-day efforts, in the past few years he has added family members to the leadership of the company.

Daughter Nicole Stewart oversees operations; son Eddy assists in managing plant operations; and son-in-law Joe Stewart directs marketing and sales.

"It all begins with the quality of the equipment," said Joe Stewart, who spent 15 years in financial services in marketing and sales before joining Specialty Fabricators in January 2015. "The equipment designed and built here are constructed to the high-

frigerated grab & go cases); and prepared food bars (salad, soup, hot bars).

With strong family support behind him, Ed spends more time planning and developing Specialty Fabricators' future direction. "We believe that our organization

has a very bright future. We have a strong foundation with exceptional craftsmen and design professionals. As we continue to have a strong presence in our backyard, our goal is to deepen our relationships throughout the US and expanding our brand.

"Overall square footage is shrinking; it's a much more challenging environment for all retailers," he stated.

"We have to help them become more productive and efficient. That means greater focus on energy usage and creating products that better utilize the space available."

Other than the Symbouras management team, other Specialty Fabricators associates also have multi-generational connections. Ross Varra, head of engineering and operations, now works with his son, Rob at the company. This theme is consistent throughout the plant with 3 additional father/son personnel. Other key Specialty Fabricators associates include Vicki Aaronson, advanced bookkeeper, and Buddy Wilkins, purchasing manager.

It's been a great 20-year run for Ed Symbouras. His low key, hands-on approach to the business can best be reflected by his own description of the company's strengths.

"We specialize in providing fixture solutions to major supermarkets and high quality specialty markets. Our teams in design, engineering and refrigeration continuously collaborate on creating each fixture to be the best in reducing shrink for our customers, energy efficiency, reliability and durability. Possibilities can be endless when devising your merchandising plan. Our experience in design, manufacturing and craftsmanship is evident in our strong relationships within the supermarket community that spans over 20 years. When you partner with us, you can expect an experience that is results driven, consultative and collaborative. We have the expertise to help you maximize your merchandising capabilities with fixtures that are the highest of quality, reliability and beauty."



It's a family affair at Specialty Fabricators. The management team, led by Ed Symbouras (3rd from l) also includes (l-r): son-in-law Joe Stewart, daughter Nicole Stewart and son Eddy.

est standard. One of our primary objectives are to maximize merchandising capability, build our fixtures to withstand high volume environments while capturing the vision of the merchants and designers. What's also important to know is that we're deeply involved with our customers, truly understand their needs and quickly adapt to an everchanging market. That's a key point of difference between us and some of our national competitors."

Nicole Stewart also touted the importance of customer service. "Having close relationships with our retailers certainly sets us apart. As supermarkets and convenience stores continue to evolve, equipment is taking on a more important role. And when they call us with a service issue, it is vital that we act quickly to resolve any concerns they may have."

Today, the company's marketing area extends the entire U.S. with a significant presence in the New England and Mid-Atlantic markets with a team of high quality regional representatives and best in class refrigeration distributors. It services such large chains as Ahold USA and Albertsons; regional merchants such as Big Y, ShopRite and Weis; and true independents like Morton Williams, Dave's Marketplace and Gourmet Garage. Specialty Fabricators also builds customized equipment for convenience stores such as Quick Chek and Tedeschi Food Shops.

Specialty Fabricators builds both remote and self-contained cases that fall within three distinct categories: 3PS (food service cases); MMRs (mobile merchandising re-

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CUSTOM GROCER FIXTURES



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Ed Symbouras
President & CEO
Specialty Fabricators