

Pennsylvania

Making Things Happen

An Interview with Joseph A. Hardy III,
Founder and Chief Executive Officer, 84 Lumber Company,
and Founder, Nemacolin Woodlands Resort



Joseph A. Hardy III

EDITORS' NOTE After graduating with a degree in industrial engineering from the University of Pennsylvania, Joe Hardy joined his family's jewelry company as a salesman. In 1952, he left the family business to open Green Hills Lumber, founding his second business, 84 Lumber Company, in 1956. Additionally, Hardy began a four-year term in 2004 as Vice Chairman, Fayette County Board of Commissioners. Hardy has been presented with the Philanthropist of the Year Award from the Association of Fundraising Professionals; the Philanthropist of the Year Award from the Washington County Community Foundation; and the Golden Hammer Award from Home Channel News.

COMPANY AND PROPERTY BRIEF Founded by Joe Hardy in 1956 in the town of Eighty Four, Pennsylvania, where the original store continues to operate, 84 Lumber Company (www.84lumbercompany.com) is the largest privately held building materials supplier to professional contractors in the country. The company operates more than 385 locations in 37 states across the United States, including 13 component-manufacturing plants. With nearly 6,000 associates nationwide, 84 Lumber Company provides professional contractors with quality building materials and industry-leading services, such as risk insurance, financing, and builder plan services.

Situated 70 miles southeast of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Nemacolin Woodlands Resort (www.nemacolin.com) features 335 luxurious

guest rooms, suites, town-homes, and single-family homes, 125 of which are located in the spectacular Chateau LaFayette, with 42 more in the AAA Five Diamond Falling Rock boutique hotel and clubhouse, serving the Pete Dye-designed Mystic Rock golf course. The resort is also home to the Woodlands Spa, offering more than 100 treatments; more than 31,000 square feet of meeting and banquet space; 16 dining venues and lounges; and a private airfield. Nemacolin's outdoor attractions include two championship golf courses, a 30-station sporting clays facility, the 18-mile Off Road Driving Academy featuring Hummer and Toyota FJ Cruiser vehicles, an equestrian center, a downhill and cross-country skiing facility, and the large, Hawaiian-style Paradise Pool.

The 84 Lumber brand has experienced tremendous growth since you founded the company in 1956. Did you know in the early days you would have such success?

I get asked about my vision for the company, but I was so busy running around I had no time to think about it. I was so focused and into it that I didn't worry about those things.

Over the years, have you been able to find talented employees in Pennsylvania?

The people are exceptional. Our policy is to promote from within, and we rarely violate it. So the employees who can move up move up fast. We have managers as young as 22, and some of our managers make six figures. Pennsylvania has very good people, and today especially, your people are everything.

Pennsylvania has world-class companies, great universities, and renowned hospitals. Is there a good understanding, outside of Pennsylvania, of the opportunities that are available for businesses?

I feel good about Pennsylvania. For example, we put Nemacolin Woodlands Resort up 20 years ago, and it has really arrived. We have about 3,000 acres, and you'd be surprised at the number of companies that go there for retreats, sales meetings, and incentive trips. Automobile companies have even used it for new car introductions.

Nemacolin could compete with any resort in the world. How did you bring it up to such a high level?

When I travel, I try to gather ideas, and I bring them back to Nemacolin. If we didn't have Nemacolin, I'd have a big warehouse to put all of those ideas in. You have to be curious.

That's what drives everybody to raise the bar at Nemacolin.

Where did you get the notion to have a zoo at Nemacolin?

I thought it was just an experiment, but people who see it cannot believe it. It's amazing how it caught on. People are really getting back to nature and enjoying interacting with these animals.

You are also highly involved in public service. Why is that so important to you?

I have a lot of things going on now. In the East End community of Uniontown, Pennsylvania, which is about 90 percent black, we're building a new school. The students are all bright-eyed, and they contribute every penny they have to this building program, and it touches you – it really does. It may seem corny, but I get more emotional about it than they do.

Pennsylvania's Governor is very business-oriented. How critical is public/private sector partnership to the state's success?

It is very important. You have to work together; it's the only way you get anything done. Whatever happened to diplomacy? Whatever happened to compromise? There are going to be factions in this world, but you have to deal with them; you can't ignore them. Sure, there are differences, but let's agree on that and go forward.

You've had so much success in your life and career. Do you ever take the time to appreciate it?

I always look to tomorrow. There are more opportunities ahead in emerging countries, and I think we'll be exporting goods from Pennsylvania.

Do you ever think about retiring?

I've done what I've wanted to do for the past 53 years. What is the difference? I couldn't play golf every day. I don't look for retirement; I look for action – for something to happen, for something to shake the status quo. It would drive me crazy to sit still. Telling me to take it easy would be like putting me in a six-by-six-foot cell.

Some believe that entrepreneurship is waning in the U.S. Do you feel that way?

I feel it's as strong as it ever was. Any person who has confidence in himself can do anything. I don't care what your ethnic, religious, or economic background is – individuals can do whatever they want if they just persist. You just have to try. Most importantly, you have to be curious and you have to take risks. ●