

A Place Like No Other

An Interview with
Joseph A. Hardy III, Founder
84 Lumber and Nemaocolin



EDITORS' NOTE *Joseph Hardy III went from being a college student selling home-grown vegetables door-to-door to become the Founder and CEO of what today is the largest privately owned building materials supplier to professional contractors, 84 Lumber Company. After graduating from the University of Pittsburgh with an Engineering degree, Hardy became the top-producing salesman for the family's Hardy & Hayes jewelry company. At the age of 31, he left Hardy & Hayes and opened Green Hills Lumber. A few*



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years later, Hardy pooled his resources with his two younger brothers and a friend to purchase a tract of land in the rural town of Eighty Four, Pennsylvania. There, in 1956, he opened a 'cash and carry' lumber yard focused on professional home builders in the tristate region of Pennsylvania, Ohio, and West Virginia. Hardy called his new business 84 Lumber Company. Hardy also founded Nemaocolin Woodlands Resort, one of North America's premier resort destinations. Hardy's business experience and desire to help Fayette County create a better business and economic base to create more jobs and a better tax base prompted him to run for a seat as a Fayette County Commissioner in 2003. Hardy was elected and began serving his term as Vice Chairman of the Board of Commissioners of Fayette County in 2004.

COMPANY BRIEF *Today, 84 Lumber Company (www.84lumber.com) maintains its corporate headquarters in Eighty Four, Pennsylvania, where the original store continues to operate. The company posted sales of just under \$1.4 billion in 2011 as it continued to weather the housing downturn in the United States. The company operates 260 stores, four component-manufacturing plants, and employs 3,500 associates nationwide.*

Nemaocolin Woodlands Resort (www.nemaocolin.com) is a lavish AAA Four Diamond and Forbes Travel Guide Four Star resort featuring three hotels, including Falling Rock, a 42-room AAA Five Diamond boutique hotel and clubhouse. The resort also boasts Lautrec, one of 43 restaurants in the world to earn both the AAA Five Diamond and Forbes Travel Guide Five Star ratings; the internationally acclaimed Woodlands Spa; 36 holes of golf on the Links Course and the Pete Dye-designed Mystic Rock; a sporting clays Shooting Academy; Equestrian Center; Jeep® off-road Driving Academy; and 15 on-site restaurants and lounges among a multitude of amenities.

Twenty-five years ago, you started purchasing the property that is now Nemaocolin out of bankruptcy. What did you see that helped you envision that this could become what it has become?

It was more dumb luck. I was 64 at the time and I had been fairly successful in the lumber business. I wanted to do something else. I acquired the original 400 acres and we sat down as a family to decide what to do with it. Now we have about 2,000 acres.

Early on, I knew I wanted to build a championship golf course like Mystic Rock. We set about acquiring adjacent land when possible, which has allowed us to offer such an array of activities. I knew it would be a great destination but never dreamed it would get the coverage it is getting today. We have a lot of international customers – it's coming into its own.

In terms of hospitality, how do you continue to provide the best service?

We're Four Star and Four Diamond overall with the Five Diamond Falling Rock and Five Diamond and Five Star Lautrec restaurant; there aren't more than three or four in the country rated like this. One very important thing I did is to get the best-skilled people to work on and at the property. Fayette County also offers a high quality of people.

I continue to travel, which helps me get new ideas and methods. So I can take you on a tour and tell you where the various elements on the property came from. I try to collect something from everywhere I go and try to bring it back here.

With anything in life, you have to experience it and you have to share it with people to get a kick out of it. The people who come here really do enjoy it. I don't think we'll ever have a chain, but it might be interesting to have something in the south to go to in the winter.

Is this resort truly for everybody, corporate clientele as well as families?

It's a good mix. It will never seem crowded though – you can have a business group here, a wedding, and transient guests and there's so much space that they never feel overwhelmed by too many people. We have tried to remain very contemporary and to have something for everybody, and make everyone feel welcome.

A large number of our visitors are from Washington, D.C. since it's only a two-and-a-half to three hour drive from here. With the inconveniences of flying today, it's a great bonus that 30 percent of the nation's population lives within 500 miles of Nemaocolin.

Is there an ongoing need to invest in improvements?

A place like this is never finished. I get a kick out of that – it's fun. But it's nice to see how it has become successful and that it's getting recognition.

Do you ever take the time to walk around the property to enjoy what you have created?

I spend at least two hours daily just walking around improving things – it gives me something to do in my old age. But I look to always do something new as well. I love to see people really enjoying what I'm trying to do – that is the most important thing.

You're 89, but your energy seems endless. What is the secret?

It's about really enjoying what I do and having a sense of humor. For instance, we have all these wild animals running around and it makes people feel good. Fayette County has the second lowest household income in Pennsylvania and I've encouraged the schools in the area to bring the kids here on field trips so they can see something like this and enjoy it. It has to help them later in life to have learned from my experience that anybody can do something like this. If I can do it, anyone can.

My other passion is to see the people who work with us become successful.

Looking back, has it been a good ride?

I can't believe 25 years have gone by. Our greatest mark is the quality of our people – they are exceptional. You can build castles and all that but, in the end, it's how you're treated that makes the difference. There is a level of enjoyment our employees find in their work here. Our people are creating a family atmosphere that they certainly have bought into, and that, as with everything, starts at the top.

In the future, will there be more changes to the property?

Absolutely, you have to stay contemporary. ●

Chateau Lafayette, one of the three luxurious hotel accommodations at Nemaocolin Woodlands Resort in Farmington, Pennsylvania