



2022 Retail Lumber Dealers Association of Maine's Lumber Persons of the Year

Joe Hondel
Deering Lumber

When Joe Hondel applied for his first job in lumber, he was told there was “no way a shoe salesman would make it in the building industry.”

That business is long gone, but Joe eventually found his way into a lumber yard. He recently retired after 33 years with Deering Lumber.

Of course, this career was not necessarily inevitable for Joe. Unlike many lumbermen, he was not born into the industry, sweeping up nails on the shop floor while he was still a child. Nor was he one of the many teens or twenty-somethings who wandered into a lumber yard looking to work his way through school and just never left. He came to it later than most.

“I actually was able to choose this industry,” he recalls. “After working for a couple of major retailers, Sears and LL Bean, in management positions for several years I knew I wanted to pursue a different career. I had always enjoyed building and wood working.”

Despite the early predictions to the contrary, Joe did make it in the building industry.

When he started at Deering, C.D. Armstrong had recently purchased the company from his father, who had owned it since the 1950s. (Of course, the company's roots stretch all the way back to 1866 and the Deering family, but that's a whole other story.) He expanded from the company's original home in Biddeford, adding locations in Kennebunk and Springvale. His vision and dedication impressed Joe. “C.D. was very committed to the industry, community and his employees,” he says –

and it contributed mightily to Joe's job satisfaction in his new career.

He also loved the personal side of the industry, which is as much about building relationships and trust as it is about building houses. "Where else can you do business with a hand shake?" Joe notes.

Over the years Joe moved up the ranks at Deering. He started on the sales counter, then moved into outside sales. He eventually rose to purchasing manager and closed out his run at the company as sales manager.

Joe also proved to be an emerging leader in the industry. He served for years on the RLDAM board, including two as president.

Even though he's now leaving his chosen field behind, as he puts it, Joe is still bullish on the lumber business. "Many say our industry is no longer enjoyable," he says. "It is changing and is what you make of it. You have a choice: is your glass half full or half empty?"

Joe has been married to his wife, Maureen, for nearly 40 years and until recently they lived in Saco, where Joe grew up. They recently purchased a new home on on Lake Sherburn in Waterboro. Now that he's retired, Joe looks forward to traveling, boating, fishing, and "attempting golf."

They've raised two children. Their son and his wife are in Saco, close enough for a weekly dinner. Their daughter is in Girdwood, a town in southern Alaska near Anchorage – "too far from home, but a great place to visit," Joe notes. (That visit would require driving for approximately 76 hours and 4,600 miles.)

He looks back favorably on his years in the lumber industry. "I believe you get out of life what you put into it, both personally and professionally," he summarizes. "I have always tried to live by the golden rule of treating others as I would like to be treated."

It sure beats selling shoes.
