

NYLILA Lumber Person of the Year: Joe Geluso, Garden State Lumber

If you were to look up the phrase “job satisfaction” in the encyclopedia, you might find Joe Geluso’s photo next to it. Over the course of a 40-plus year career, Joe has dedicated himself almost exclusively to outside sales. You might think over all that time he would have climbed into the upper reaches of management – but that’s not really where Joe wanted to be. He’d much rather be out on the road.

“I have generally turned down most opportunities for advancement because I learned early in my career that I loved what I did and the quality of life it afforded me,” he declares matter-of-factly.

The first thing he learned was that he wasn’t going to be a psychologist. Joe earned his degree in psychology at SUNY Cortland and even worked at a youth center for about six months after college, but suffice to say it was decidedly not his vocation.

“I realized that in order to move along in the field I was going to have to keep going to school,” he remembers. He had a brother-in-law who was a salesman and connected him to a job opportunity. “I felt that by going into sales I could determine my own destiny. The harder you work the more money you can make – I liked that concept.”

Shortly thereafter, Joe ran into a neighbor who ran a small millwork company, Van Roy Millwork, whose son had no interest in taking over the family business. Instead, he taught Joe to run the company. He was eventually made sales manager, which led to the next important lesson in Joe’s career. “I was very fortunate to realize early on that I found it so frustrating to work with people and try to get them to do what I would do, to sell the way I sell,” he says. “These are common sense things; someone’s either a salesman or they’re not.”

When he made the jump to Consolidated Lumber, opportunity came his way rather again. He became their top salesman within a year and was offered another sales manager position. He demurred.

“I love what I do. I don’t want to be the manager,” he explains. “I don’t need a title.”

That was good enough for Joe for 34 years. “All the years I worked for them I had the best job in the world,” he says.

Eventually, however, changes were afoot at Consolidated. The former family company was up for sale to a group of investors. Fortunately for Joe, he had a good reputation and following and was able to move over to Garden State Lumber. He made the move there in 2016 – and he still has the best job in the world. He has nothing but praise for the company, from management to inventory control to marketing materials. “I could do my job with my eyes closed – they’re that well-run,” he says.

For Joe, his job is not something he *has* to do, it’s something he *gets* to do. “Joe looks forward to work on Monday,” he says. “I get up every day and go visit my friends and family. I see the same people I’ve been seeing for 35-40 years. It’s pretty cool.”

Joe is similarly steady and satisfied with his personal life. He and his wife of 44 years, Anne, live in Greenlawn, Long Island. They have two sons, Justin and Brandon, and two grandchildren.

It's a career path Joe highly recommends. "I've always found it extremely rewarding. It's as close as you can get to having your own company without the worries," he says. "To me going to an office is like being in jail. Once you're an outside salesman, you never go back."

In his spare time, Joe likes golfing and fishing. "I'm adequate at the first, much more distinguished in the second," he notes.

As he looks back at a four-decade career and humbly accepts this award, is he thinking about riding off into the Long Island sunset? "As long as my health is good, I can't imagine retiring," he counters.