

Thank You and Farewell, Bill Lee!

After more than 20 years of serving the independent home improvement industry through various roles at the North American Retail Hardware Association (NRHA), president and CEO Bill Lee will retire at the end of 2017. Here, we highlight Lee's career, the path the association has taken under his leadership and how his time in this industry has changed him for the better.

A Brief Career History

Lee worked with NRHA as an outside marketing consultant for 12 years before being hired as the association's marketing director in 1996. During the early 1990s and late 2000s, NRHA launched its custom publishing department and catalog business under Lee's guidance. In 2008, Lee took over as CEO and focused on making NRHA a more informative and relevant resource for members.

"I wanted the association to become even more valuable to the members it serves," Lee says. "My goal was to strengthen the organization and bring the industry together through NRHA."

Career and Industry Accomplishments

Lee's focus in developing NRHA programs was always to fulfill the association's mission: to help independent retailers become better and more profitable merchants. NRHA staff and incoming president and CEO Bob Cutter are prepared to continue serving retailers through future association endeavors.

To read more about the impression Lee has had on the industry, read this month's Last Word on Page 63.

The Industry's Impact on Lee

"Over the past 20-some years, my wife Jane has been a huge industry supporter, too," Lee says. "This industry is focused on family, and some of the families that own and operate the businesses NRHA works with have become Jane's and my best friends. That's probably the richest, most positive byproduct of my career."

As Lee enters retirement, he feels blessed to have friendships with people all over the country and the world that he's developed through his career at NRHA.

"The people in this industry are what have kept me passionate for all of these years," Lee says. "I love the industry, and I love the amazing people who take risks every day to run their businesses. I've had a lot of fun along the way, and my work has been very rewarding."

Next Steps for Lee

In the immediate future, Lee will stay involved in a handful of association initiatives he enjoys, such as supporting the Retail Leadership Institute and moderating some roundtables. Additionally, he plans to continue volunteering with The Fuller Center for Housing. He also plans to relax, reflect and spend time with his family before starting his next chapter. ➔

Lee's Contributions to NRHA and the Industry



First Website and Training Course

With the help of association staffers, Lee launched NRHA's first website. Additionally, he developed the original version of the product knowledge training course, a resource that the industry needed at the time. Training has since become a significant resource for independent retailers.

NRHA now offers eight online training courses of 240 modules, as well as more than 45 Trainer's Toolbox lessons and more than 60 downloadable resources. Visit nrha.org/membership for more.



New NRHA Headquarters

Under Lee's leadership and fiscal management, the association was able to purchase and renovate its new headquarters in downtown Indianapolis. The three-story building includes two floors of office space, one that serves as home base for NRHA staff and the other of which is rented out.

The building is also home to the William J. Lee Education & Conference Center. The new building is a great investment for the association, and it serves as a place for retailers to meet and call home.



NRHA's Retail Leadership Institute

Alongside NRHA leaders, longtime members and educators, Lee is proud of NRHA's Retail Leadership Institute and within it, the Retail Management Certification Program, a college-level training program for independent retailers.

"It's important that NRHA provides higher-level educational programs to help owners and future owners understand their businesses," Lee says. "The key for the industry's future is developing next-generation leaders, and that's what the Retail Leadership Institute does."