

Ben Tedesco
Howe Lumber Co., Inc.

2014 Lifetime Achievement Award Recipient

The Massachusetts Retail Lumber Dealers Association is proud to honor Ben Tedesco with the 2014 Lifetime Achievement Award.

Ben's career in the lumber industry started in 1937 when he was just 9 years old. His family lived next door to Basley's Lumber in Newton, MA, and his task was painting the curbs and entrances. By 16 ½ he was the yard foreman, a position he held until leaving for the Navy in 1945. During Ben's Navy stint, he was on a post-World War II Goodwill tour throughout the Mideast, traveling to Syria, Beirut, Damascus and Turkey. Leaving the Navy in 1947, he returned to Basley's, which later became Edwards Lumber. After leaving Edwards Lumber in 1950, Ben gained experience working at several companies in the region, including Guthrie Lumber (Waltham), Diamond Match Company (New London, CT) and Heald Lumber (Hubbardston).

In 1967, he opened Tedesco Builders Supply in West Boylston, later relocating to Worcester. At the time he went out on his own, Ben had only \$610 in his bank account, his backer was tragically killed shortly after the yard opened, and he was leasing the property at \$300 a month. While there were moments he considered giving up, he kept going, in part due to solid relationships with suppliers, including Howard Smith of Brockway Smith, and a loyal customer base. Eventually the business grew to encompass a 28,000 square foot facility back in West Boylston, with all three of his children (Richard, David and Sharon) working alongside their father. Ben decided to close the business in 1994. But not yet ready for retirement, he went to work for Moore Lumber in Ayer through 2009. At age 87, he maintains an active schedule at Howe Lumber, East Brookfield, working in outside sales.

Ben is an avid baseball fan, with an encyclopedic knowledge of statistics, players and the history of the game. Over the years he was a semi-pro pitcher, a part-time scout for the pros (including the Red Sox, Dodgers, and Yankees), and managed a semi-pro team where one of his players was the great Babe Ruth. As a coach and manager, Ben said, "I always wanted to win, but teaching was more important." Living in New London, CT during the 1950's, Ben served as the youth activities chairman for the town and as secretary of the 70-member Bishop Flanagan Athletic Council. He was also recruited to run for office, but withdrew his name from consideration when he had an opportunity to move back to central Massachusetts.

Ben's legacy includes over 40 years of service with NRLA and MRLDA. He served as a director on the NRLA board for eight years, was a member of the convention committee for over a decade, and in the late 1980s to early 1990s served on NRLA's Advisory Co-op. When sharing his memories of past NRLA conventions, he noted that there were frequently over 10,000 attendees. Speakers and entertainers during Ben's tenure on the committee were internationally known, including Bob Hope, Pearl Bailey, Jimmy Carter and Gerald Ford. Ben was often the staff liaison to special guests. One of his fondest memories was the day spent with the late Yankees owner George Steinbrenner, who Ben commented was smart, friendly and spot-on with his assessment of coaches and players. Steinbrenner invited Ben to attend his media events throughout the day and they bonded over baseball and mutual friends and players.

A director of MRLDA for 18 years, Ben was on the executive committee as treasurer and served as board president in 1981. During his tenure as board president, Ben successfully lobbied the Massachusetts legislature when they proposed moving from monthly to weekly sales tax reporting, Ben made the case that very often, dealers were not paid for materials until a month or longer after the date of purchase or delivery, and the legislation would have placed an unrealistic financial burden on companies.. He was also one of the MRLDA "Three Amigos," along with Joe Cusack and Bob Skelley, sharing decades of laughs, stories, and escapades.

Ben's family includes his wife Betty, children Richard, David and Sharon, and eight grandchildren. He continues to follow baseball, golf, and attends as many NRLA and MRLDA events as possible.

When asked to share his guiding principles and philosophies with current and future NRLA and MRLDA members, Ben reflected, "I don't know of any industry like the lumber industry, I wouldn't change anything. But if you're going to be involved, be active."