NHRLA Lumber Person of the Year: John Voter, Pelham Building Supply

“You are successful when you love what you do and get paid well for doing what you love,” says John Voter of Pelham Building Supply in Pelham, New Hampshire.

By that definition, he is truly a successful man. Overachievement seems to be a consistent theme throughout his life and work. In fact, you might say that Voter has been looking up – literally – since the start of his career.

He was installing suspended ceilings in the 1970s before he was a teenager, working for Pitcher Associates, the acoustical ceiling company his father and uncle founded. In his early teens, he spent summers and other vacations working in the warehouse, but by the time he reached the ripe old age of fifteen, he was ready for a career change.

“I decided I didn’t want to work for my father anymore so he brought me to his friend, George Dinsmore. I was hired as a laborer for his construction company,” Voter recalls.

Again, he worked summers and vacations, as well as weekends, and quickly demonstrated a talent beyond his years. By the time he was seventeen, Voter was running one of Dinsmore’s framing crews.

He was just as much of an overachiever in school. Entering high school in his hometown of Salem, New Hampshire in 1980, Voter had completed all of the school’s available classes by 1983. He spent his senior year attending classes at the University of New Hampshire and in 1984 enrolled as a student at the University of Vermont on a four-year Air Force ROTC scholarship.

Majoring in electrical engineering, Voter also qualified to be an Air Force pilot, just for good measure. Unfortunately, he subsequently lost that qualification due to poor eyesight. Voter had a choice to make: the Air Force would honor his scholarship if he followed through on his plan to become an electrical engineer. Naturally, he went his own way.

“I chose to return to the construction industry,” he explains. “I went back to work for George Dinsmore for one year before starting my own construction company.”

For fifteen years Voter was his own boss at his contracting business – but in typical fashion, he couldn’t just settle for just one job. After buying his parents a new house, Voter transformed the quaint farmhouse in which he and his two sisters had been raised into Voter’s Restaurant, where he worked behind the bar.
By 2001, Voter had moved on from both family businesses and went to work at Benson Lumber, where he took on exactly the kind of workload you might expect: “Construction manager, installation manager, general manager, general contractor, Mr. Fix-it, manager of the plowing crew, manager of all Benson homes – fixing, installation, and general maintenance. And general manager of the door shop.”

From there, Voter did a short stint at Huttig in Maine before returning to New Hampshire to join the outside lumber sales team at Pelham Building Supply. It was a homecoming of sorts: founder Ron Bedard was a good friend and client of Voter’s father. “I can remember installing suspended ceilings at Pelham Building Supply with my father on weekends in my pre-teen days,” Voter recalls. “Now I am employed there as a lumber salesman.”

Over the years Voter has grown into a leader in the industry, though not always by choice. He first got involved with the NRLA during his time at Benson Lumber. Brad Benson had served on the board for a number of years and was ready to step down, but he wanted someone there to represent the business – and neither of his brothers were interested. “So, Brad invited me and my wife, Nancy, to an annual meeting and had me attend a board meeting,” Voter explains. “At that meeting he announced that he would be stepping down and that I was his replacement. That’s how my NRLA career began.”

He was eventually promoted into a leadership position in similar fashion: “Years later, I was at the LBM Expo when Mark Torrisi came over and thanked me for volunteering to be Vice President.” Thus, his NRLA service continued.

In his spare time, Voter and his wife of nearly thirty years, Nancy, raise “three fur babies” in their dream home in Salem. They like to divide their time between home – gardening, yard work, entertaining – and travel, spending summers visiting Florida, Bermuda and Boothbay Harbor, Maine.

“I have loved this industry from a very young age and have been truly blessed with happiness and fulfillment in my life and career,” Voter says. This award is yet another entry in a sterling record of overachievement.