

NYLILA Lumber Person of the Year: Richard Paci, American Lumber Co. Inc.

The April 6, 1994, edition of *Suffolk Life*, which was at that time a weekly newspaper in Suffolk County, New York, carried a story with the headline, "Helping Hands Build Expanding Mission." It was a heartwarming account of a community coming together to help rebuild a charitable mission. Companies like Waldbaum's supermarkets, Entenmann's Bakery and Dunkin' Donuts all contributed to stocking the mission's pantry, but it was NYLILA (then just LILA) that refurbished the building itself.

"This is what happens when everybody donates just a little bit," said the man spearheading the operation at the time, LILA vice-president Richard Paci.

Looking back on it now, he cites it as one of many highlights of his long and distinguished career in the lumber industry. "We all came away with a heightened awareness that others really need our help from time to time," he recalls. "What is most memorable is when the Association members served Thanksgiving dinner there."

It's fitting that Richard should look at his career through the lens of good, old-fashioned, American values like working hard and extending oneself for neighbors. No coincidence that the headquarters address of American Lumber – the Company with which he remains proud to identify and where he has such profound impact, is "#1 American Way!"

Richard began working for American Lumber 'way back in 1979, when he was just twenty-one years old. Last year, which marked the Company's first full century in business, he could accurately proclaim that he's worked with two generations of the Schwebel family and three generations of Kayes (the two related families which have owned American Lumber).

Born in Queens, New York, Richard grew up in the neighborhood of Woodside before moving to Nassau County in his teens – first in East Meadow and then in Merrick. He received his Associate's degree in business, then went on to earn his B.S. in Accounting degree from C.W. Post, academic achievements which he says helped him bond with members of the Kaye family.

"My college degrees in business and accounting provided a good channel of communication between myself and Sid Kaye, who had been a CPA," he explains. "Later, when I was introduced to Barry Kaye in the '80s, his degrees in business from Wharton and in law from NYU gave us a common language and perspective, so it was easy to work well together."

It probably also helps that Richard has worn nearly every 'hat' there was to wear at American's Operations, from yard worker, to lumber checker, to assistant foreman and, finally, foreman. He was glad after that, when the opportunity arose, to make a career move into sales... later to expand his involvement, as well, into marketing and purchasing. Although neither he nor his Company have much use for organization

charts and formal titles, he long has functioned as American Lumber's Director of Sales and Purchasing.

Along the way, Richard has played a central role in his Company's growth, helping to enhance its overall effectiveness by integrating his purchasing philosophy with American's well-deserved reputation for loyalty... showcasing Richard's exceptional knack for relationship-building both with American's customers and its vendors. "American enjoys unusually effective coordination between the purchasing and distribution aspects of our warehouse-based wholesaling and marketing enterprise," he says.

In addition to his career at American, Richard is a leader in the Long Island lumber industry. He 'answered the call' by serving as vice-president of LILA, and subsequently was the very first wholesaler ever invited to serve as Association president, an office he held with distinction. In terms, moreover, of lumber industry fellowship, he was a member of the Concatenated Order of Hoo-Hoo when there was a presence on Long Island.

His wish for younger folks coming up in the industry is that they will have opportunities similar to what he, himself, enjoyed. "Take the time to absorb the experience of those who precede you," he advises. "I have been blessed to have people in my life who took the time and taught me things that I still value today."

In his spare time, Richard enjoys most sports ("Golf is my favorite," he adds, "Not only for the golf, but for the camaraderie and laughs"), as well as a classically American hobby: "I have always had a passion for classic cars and hot rods. Growing up, I loved working on cars, including, for example, a 1957 Chevy Bel Air and, especially, a 1963 Chevy Corvette which I bought when I was 19 and still enjoy today."

Richard and his wife Terry – whom he met in high school – live in Goshen, New York. They have two sons, Joseph and Matthew.

For Richard Paci, the life and career of a lumberman are about more than buying or selling – they're about contributing to something that lasts.

"What I love is that, at the end of the day, what we sell goes on to create something," he says. "Whether it is a repair or remodel or new build, it is something tangible, something that might be beneficial not just for years... but even for centuries." Sounds a lot like American Lumber!