

VRLDA Lifetime Achievement Award: Ron Warner, Goodro Lumber

Ron Warner had a long and proud career in the Vermont Lumber business, rising from truck driver to part owner of an independent lumber yard between 1984 and his untimely passing from cancer in June of this year. Sadly, he cannot be here to accept this honor and join this celebration. Fortunately, we can still get a sense of the man from one of the people who knew him best, his business partner, Tim Comes.

“Ron enjoyed every day and always tried to put a positive spin on everything. He lived life to the fullest and was liked by everyone he met,” Tim recalls. “He was always there for his family and friends. He worked extremely hard at making sure all of our customers were satisfied with our service, often times delivering materials in his pick-up truck on the weekends and after hours.”

Ron’s first job in the industry was driving trucks for Middlebury Building Center. A couple of years later, he began his tenure at Goodro Lumber in East Middlebury, where he remained for the rest of his life. He also started there as a truck driver, which was just about the time he met a salesperson named Tim Comes. They couldn’t have known it then, but it was the start of what would become an important partnership, not only for the two men, but for the company.

In a short time, Ron rose through the ranks to become yard foreman. His superior work ethic was always evident.

“When he was yard foreman if everybody had already gone home and there were loads to be taken out, he would take them out,” says Tim. “Sometimes he’d get out of there at ten in the evening and be back at three o’clock the next morning to start getting things ready.”

From foreman, Ron advanced into inside sales and eventually ordering lumber and plywood by 2008. In 2010, he made the biggest move of his career.

Goodro Lumber had been around since 1930, when Harry and Mildred Goodro purchased a sawmill and started sawing custom lumber – including two-by-two hardwood squares for making butter tubs. In 1950, Harry retired, leaving the business to his son Rodney and son-in-law Wyman Thomas. In 1983, Mark and Cindy Thomas took over from their father, and took on longtime employee Denny Charron as a partner; they added another partner, Richard Miller, in 1985. Finally, in 2010, Ron Warner and Tim Comes bought out Denny and Richard’s shares to become part owners alongside the Thomases; they took over managing the business.

Both men carried with them into the management office the lessons they had learned in the yard. “We tried to treat everyone the way we wanted to be treated as employees,” Tim explains. “We kind of had a leg up on other people that had never worked for anyone, in terms of knowing how an employee feels.”

The two men developed a close friendship – but then, Ron was always making friends everywhere he went. Tim remembers how when they’d go to trade shows, Ron would get up early and go walking around town for exercise. Often, by the time the show floor opened he had already found a new friend.

“Lots of times he would come back saying, ‘I met such-and-such person and we’re gonna go have dinner with him tonight,’” Tim laughs. He recalls one instance in particular, at a show in Florida where Ron struck up a conversation with the owner of a lumber yard in Michigan and his right-hand man; dinner plans soon followed. “We became longtime friends,” Tim remembers. “Every year we’d get together at the shows and go out to eat. Ron was that kind of guy. You could meet an hour later you’d be making plans for dinner. Next thing you know you might be hunting with the guy.”

Indeed, in his spare time Ron was an avid hunter. Perhaps the only hobby he enjoyed more was watching his grandchildren play sports. He also served as a volunteer firefighter for 32 years, many of them as captain. He received Vermont State Line Officer of the Year in 2002, the Chiefs Award in 2003, Addison County Firefighter of the Year in 2015 and before passing was awarded the Retired Captains Award in April of this year.

Ron was married to his wife, Marie, for 34 years and raised two step-children; they lived in Salisbury.

“He had a good run and came a long way from where he started,” Tim summarizes. “He always worked hard to get where he was, so kudos to him. If he was here, I’d tell him to keep up the good work.”