



ADVISOR

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HARRIS ACE HARDWARE WINS COX CENTURY AWARD

Harris Ace Hardware and Building Supply in Jesup, GA is the recipient of the 2008 Cox Century Award. This award is given annually by the Cox Family Enterprise Center, which is a part of the Coles College of Business at Kennesaw State University and is dedicated to the research, education, and recognition of family businesses.

Harris Ace Hardware and Building Supply was founded as a grocery store in 1907 by J.M. Harris. After J.M.'s death, his 16-year-old son John Henry took over the business and expanded into other retail areas such as gin and feed mills and corn packing. In 1972, the business was converted into a hardware and lumber store. The store is in its fifth generation.

Association News

CSA Develops Plan to Support Members in 2008

Few times in the history of this industry have members needed their trade association in the way that you need CSA today. Housing starts are roughly half of what they were in 2005, and improvement does not seem to be just around the corner.

The CSA Board of Directors gathered in January to consider the biggest struggles that members face and to develop plans to help solve or at least mitigate those struggles. We also looked at the business of CSA and how we might improve it.

Nuts and Bolts

Part of our strategy to help you become a stronger independent dealer involves rolling out some services to help you cut costs. The first of these programs is discounted credit card processing. Most everyone already has a credit card processor, and the vendors for this service are a dime a dozen. In fact, CSA is bombarded at least monthly by someone who wants to provide this service "for a discount" to members. In almost every circumstance, the savings is not really there – someone just wants to use our name to get their foot in your door. The program we are rolling out with Merchant Services of North America is different because the savings really are there. The program has rolled out to independent dealers in several other regions with great success.

We are also going to be reviewing options for ways to help you with collections. This might include offering educational programs, developing a "best practices" collections manual, or rolling out collection services at a rate you could not get by yourself. While we do not yet know exactly what this will look like, we do understand that you needed it yesterday. We will move rapidly to provide assistance in this area, and are putting a small task force together to work on this project. If you have an interest in participating, contact Jim Moody.

Health insurance continues to be at the top of the list of challenges you face. As you know, there is no easy solution here. Health insurance is simply expen-

sive and becoming more expensive. The upcoming election may offer some solutions (or challenges, depending on your viewpoint), but we will also be searching for ways to help reduce this burden. Again, a task force is forming to work on this problem. Contact Jim Moody if you'd like to participate.

We are also working to improve the flow of information you want to know. Our newsletters and e-mails have historically included self-promotion – things we want you to know about the association to show you how your dues are being spent or to invite you to participate in programs so that you get more value for your dues dollar. It's important that we continue doing that, but it's perhaps even more important for us to provide you with more information you can use in your business. This includes things like federal and state regulation changes, updates on trends in our industry, and economic statistics that foreshadow the future marketplace.

Growing Alabama

In addition to serving you, the association has a responsibility to maintain a business model that will sustain the association. If we don't keep ourselves in business, then we won't be around to serve you. Growth of membership is a key indicator of the health of an association. While we don't believe we have recruited everyone in Georgia who could be a member, our most fertile ground for growth is in Alabama.

CSA provides services across both states, but Alabama is far under-represented in our membership. We need more Alabama dealers, and that's where we'll focus our membership campaign this year. Having the Summer Management Conference in Alabama for the first time (at Point Clear, July 10-12) and having our first chair from Alabama (David Swift) certainly sends a message that Alabama is an important part of our association.

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