

BUSINESS: Lumber still king at former planing mill

Plenty of Schells on hand for 90th anniversary events

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Stouffville's first planing mill had five owners before Wesley Schell and Clayton Stouffer took it over in 1922.

In 1927, Mr. Schell bought out his partner's portion of the business.

Since then, its location and the Schell name have remained synonymous with lumber in the heart of Stouffville.

From June 6 to 9, the company will cel-

ebate its 90th anniversary with special sales and a charity barbecue.

Over the past nine decades, the foundation of Schell's business has changed very little. Lumber is still its core component, but now there are also home building items along with the country store, which sells gardening items and farm essentials.

"Through the war years it was pretty lean times. It was hand-to-mouth. After the war, it started to pick up," said Percy Schell, one

of Wesley Schell's sons.

Even though the company's patriarch has passed on, there remains three generations of Schells operating the family business, including Percy Schell and his brother Harry, who despite being in their 80s, still regularly work at the Edward Street company.

THREE GENERATIONS AT WORK

The duo actually owned the store until about 10 years ago when they passed it on to their sons Ron and Steve.

The youngest Schell employed at the store is 19.

Eleven years ago, Wesley Schell's great-granddaughter Melissa Dubois-Harper's first job was as a cashier at Schell Lumber. Now, she's upstairs in the office working in sales and accounting.

"I liked it. I liked the atmosphere. I liked being close to my family," Mrs. Dubois-Harper said.

And that she is. Just a couple of desks away from hers is her mother Judy's.

As a teenager, Ms Schell spent her summers working for the family business, but decided it wasn't for her and went to university.

But her plans changed and 25 years ago, Ms Schell joined the company full-time, in accounting.

"We all get along ... We all kind of have our specialities in the business," she said.

In the earliest days of the Stouffville Planing Mill's operation, it had three employees, according to Percy Schell, who joined the

company in 1950.

In 1955, the company name changed to Schell Lumber Ltd. At the same time, the store expanded and a 2.5 acre site was purchased just to the north for the lumber yard.

The company continued to grow with expansions again in 1960, 1974, 1988 and in 2004 when they purchased the former co-op building directly north of them to house Schell's design centre and country store.

Schell Lumber now has 45 employees, with 14 of them from the Schell family.

Throughout the decades, Schell was associated with Ace Lumber and TIM-BR MART. In 2009, it joined forces with Home Hardware.

"We're not hardware. We're a building centre, too," Ms Schell said.

"We've always been very contractor-based but also (sold to) individuals. ... But since the community has grown, we're getting more homeowners," Mrs. Dubois-Harper said.

OPERATION EXPANDED

Connecting with the community beyond the retailer/customer relationship has always been key to the Schell family.

"I'm a big believer in taking care of the local community," Ms Schell said.

Since 1953, the company has entered a float into the Stouffville Kinsmen Santa Claus parade and the business annually sponsors local youth sports teams.

"I believe that is good for the children to get out there," Ms Schell said. "The community is very important to us on a personal and business level."

IN OUR COMMUNITY



GRAND RE-OPENING & 90TH ANNIVERSARY June 6th - 9th

Schell Lumber Home Building Centre would like to invite everyone to our Grand Re-Opening & 90th Anniversary celebration from Wednesday, June 6th - Saturday June 9th. Come join us for in store deals, product demonstrations, door prizes and a charity BBQ supporting the Stouffville Lions Club (Fri & Sat only). See our website to preview our flyer!

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