

Customer-Specific Tioga Hardwoods Focuses On Quality, Diversity and Affordability

BY TERRY MILLER



(Front row) Tioga Hardwoods sales staff (L to R) Randy Bowers, Josh Bowers, Kevin Gillette, Scott Snyder, Bill Gillette, Shawn Collins and Chad Cotterill; (Back row) Tioga Hardwoods Support Staff (L to R) Marissa Graves, Darcy Friebel, Tammy Cornish, Teri Boughton, Amy Pritchard, and Ashley Brister

Berkshire, N.Y.— Established in 2000 by principals Randy Bowers, Kevin Gillette and Scott Snyder, Tioga Hardwoods Inc. is a company that was built around the diverse background of its three principals. With combined experience of 65 years, Bowers, Gillette and Snyder decided to pool their knowledge and resources. “We identified the diversity of our skill set early on with domestic and export sales experience along with production and millwork experience,” Bowers said. “The key to Tioga’s success is primarily built on this wealth of knowledge.”

Scott Snyder has 18 years in the forest products industry with export experience primarily in Asia. Kevin Gillette has 15 years experience in production and sales, and Randy Bowers brings 15 years experience from a family-owned millwork shop, as well as 17 years in domestic wholesale lumber sales.

Tioga Hardwoods’ offices and production facility are located in Berkshire, N.Y., which is located less than 200 miles from the port of New York and approximately the same distance from Canadian cities Toronto and Montreal. At Tioga’s direct sawmill operation, production consists of 70 percent 4/4 to 8/4 Hard and Soft Maple and Cherry with the other 30 percent in White Ash, Red and White Oak, Basswood, Hickory, Aspen and Yellow Poplar. The company also produces specialty items such as pulled and ripped to width strips and cut to size squares and dimension parts, all within their 145,000 square-foot facility.

The company also buys from more than 100 vendor mills. “We’ve had some pretty large producers, sawmills, concentration yards and combinations of all come to us over the last several years and offer their production to our marketing team. We take that production and match it to a particular customer’s needs,” Snyder said.

Scott Snyder and salesman Chad Cotterill handle the export side of the business and they both travel overseas several times a year. “Chad lived in Shanghai for a year and speaks Mandarin which enables better communication with our biggest export customer base,” Snyder said. Tioga Hardwoods also has two sales offices in Asia. “Having people in place overseas that know the culture gives us a tactical advantage.”

“I’ve had the opportunity to travel to Asia with Scott and Chad on two occasions and business is different in a

lot of ways and it’s similar in a lot of ways,” Bowers said of developing relationships overseas. “Thirty-five percent of our current business is in the export market with 90 percent of it going into China, Vietnam, Malaysia, Japan or Korea,” he added.

The domestic sales team is made up of Kevin Gillette, Randy Bowers, William Gillette, Shawn Collins and Josh Bowers. “We have a good young group in our sales team both on the domestic side as well as the export side of our business. We will continue to grow this team as opportunities present themselves,” said Bowers.

“Tioga Hardwoods has had very good growth due to sales and marketing but we also have a great support team in our office with Teri Boughton, our office manager, who handles administrative duties and has been with us from the beginning. Ashley Brister is our assistant office manager and handles the day to day office duties. They have a good team handling our documentation.”

The production duties fall to Art Hicks who has spent his entire career in the lumber business. Art is the company’s yard manager who, over the past 28 years, has done everything from piling lumber, grading, shipping & receiving to tending dry kilns. “Our production team has made it easy for our sales to grow with prompt accurate shipments and shipping a quality product to our customers,” Bowers continued.

Addressing current economical issues, Gillette said being a financially savvy conservative group has enabled Tioga the ability to not only stay viable in the downturned market, but to know they will be in the market for years to come. “It took hard work to complete the scenario that afforded us the growth we have today. We put money on the bottom line and it gave us the strength to discount every invoice that comes into our office,” he

said. “We can manage in this market for a long time and we’re proud of that. Personally it gives me a great deal of pride to be able to know that our efforts are going to get us through this and give our sales staff, our vendors, and our customers the confidence where they know that they have partnered with a company that’s going to be around for a long time. We have accomplished this with help from both customers and vendors who believe in what we do and know they can trust our handshake.”

Tioga Hardwoods Inc.’s customer base is as diverse as the company’s product range. “Customer diversity is something that we strive for in our business model,” Bowers said. “We are shipping lumber into the flooring markets and kitchen cabinet manufacturers, as well as to distribution yards and millwork shops, both domestically and abroad.”

With 35 employees, the team at Tioga is committed to building alliances with their customers and vendors by meeting their needs with exceptional attention to fine details. “We’re not only marketing to the customer, we’re letting the customers explain to us what they want and then we’re figuring out how to get that product through our facility or from one of our vendors to that customer,” Gillette said. “We work closely with our supplier base to match a specific product to the needs of our customer. If that product specification is not currently available, then we work with the supplier to develop a program that will meet the customer’s requirements.

“Helping people solve problems, that’s what selling lumber is all about, it’s building a relationship and solving the problems,” Bowers added. “A few months ago we had a meeting with a vendor and a customer that produced a win-win result for all parties. Strategic alliance with our friends in business is one of the keys that got us



A view of one of Tioga Hardwoods' warehouses, which is part of the 145,000 square feet of area under roof in Berkshire, N.Y.



All Tioga trucks are loaded inside, under roof.



Tioga Hardwoods' delivery fleet includes company owned trucks and curtain side trailers.



Tioga Hardwoods ships monthly more than 100 containers, which are 40 foot in length, to over 20 countries around the world.



Tioga received FSC Chain of Custody certification on June 1, 2009.



This is an aerial view of Tioga Hardwoods' facilities in Berkshire, N.Y.

where we are and it's going to be an important key to get to the next level."

"If you're in business you can't be afraid to let your vendors, customers, truckers and contractors make a profit," Snyder said. "We are more than fair in that regard, we want to assure that everyone involved is profitable and remains in business."

Strategically located in the Northern Appalachian region near the New York/Pennsylvania border, Tioga is able to source from what many consider one of the most preferred Hardwood resources in the world. Sourcing Cherry from Pennsylvania and Hard Maple from New York, the company also obtains lumber from other regions according to customer preference. "Our product is not species specific or grade specific, its customer specific," Gillette said. "The customer needs a product, we determine how to supply it to them in the most efficient cost-effective way that everyone can be happy with. On the mill side it works the

same way. If they have a pile of logs to cut, it may not be a product that we have orders in the system for, but our job is to figure out what we can do with that pile of logs and it may go to existing customers, or it may develop a new customer."

The future for Tioga Hardwoods Inc. is about refining what has already been built. "We're always looking to improve what we have to offer our customers by refining our inventory to suit their needs because they are changing every day," Gillette said. "We have the infrastructure; we have the buildings; we've got the footprint; and we have good people in place to get the job done. Now it's about servicing our customers and vendors. We don't want to build a product and push it on the market. We want Tioga to take shape to fill customer needs. We're doing things because our customers need us to do them. Our future is building on refinement in the inventory process, a little secondary manufacturing and not to become com-

petitors of our customers but to become a better vendor to those customers, adding value to the product and service along the way. We have a new optimizing gang rip line which will start production this Fall, which will further broaden our product line."

Tioga Hardwoods Inc. is a member of the National Hardwood Lumber Assoc. (NHLA), Indiana Hardwood Lumbermen's Assoc. (IHLA), New England Lumbermen's Assoc. (NELA), Penn-York Lumbermen's Club, Appalachian Lumbermen's Club and the Empire State Forest Products Assoc. (ESFPA). The company is also Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) chain-of-custody certified. For more information about Tioga Hardwoods Inc., visit www.tiogahard-woods.com or contact by phone at (607) 657-8686; fax at (607) 657-2532 or email TiogaHdw@TiogaHardwoods.com.