

HARDWARE Retailing™

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Leading With Integrity

2026 Top Guns Honoree
David Enmark Puts People First
Page 24

CONNECT THE FUTURE

4 Ways to Engage With Next
Gen Customers and Employees
Page 32

SAFETY FIRST

Dig Into Safety Features to
Expand Sales in Power Tools
Page 42



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COVER STORY

OTHERS FIRST

Top Guns Honoree David Enmark's Focus on People Drives Success

BY LINDSEY THOMPSON

Celebrating its 20th year honoring trailblazing retailers in the channel, the North American Hardware and Paint Association (NHPA) has named its 2026 Top Guns Awards honorees, including David Enmark, CEO of The Helpful Hardware Company, based in Cumming, Georgia.

“Top Guns honorees are pillars of innovation and forward-thinking, and have helped grow their businesses through strategic leadership with consideration for their communities, their teams and the industry,” says Scott Wright, NHPA president and publisher. “They’ve grown their businesses,

challenged the status quo and led their teams through some of the industry’s toughest moments—and they’re not done yet. This year’s Top Guns are prime examples of what bold leadership looks like in independent home improvement retail today.”

David says he is honored and humbled by the recognition.

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The Best of the Best

Learn more about NHPA's Top Guns Awards program and see how these outstanding retailers are positively impacting the independent channel at YourNHPA.org/top-guns.



DAVID ENMARK

Top of Their Game

Meet the Other NHPA Top Guns Awards 2026 Honorees



Ash Ebbo, Clement's Paint

The independent paint channel is in Ash Ebbo's blood. Her father opened the store in 1986, so it has been a part of her entire life. Joining the operation full time 12 years ago, Ash went into the business with a desire to continue the legacy her father started. While she has been building future leaders, she's been growing as a leader herself and recently earned a master in business administration. As the CEO of the nine-store operation, Ash manages the back-end financials and oversees all operational areas.

Learn more about Ash in the May issue of *Paint & Decorating Retailer*



Jason Blair, TAL Building Centers

Achieving his goal of becoming a CEO by the age of 50, Jason Blair serves as CEO of TAL Building Centers, leading with a focus on the basics and building up future leaders by setting an example of accountability. Jason's journey in the independent home improvement channel began after he finished high school and started working at Payless Cashways. His journey in the industry would take him to Foxworth-Galbraith, Higginbotham Brothers, True Value and Wilco Farm Stores.

Learn more about Jason in the June issue of *Hardware Retailing*



Denise Brookhouse, Koopman Lumber

Denise Koopman was born into the industry, as her grandfather founded Koopman Lumber. While in college, Denise continued working at the stores but moved on to work as a Certified Public Accountant (CPA) at a Fortune 500 company after graduating. After several years in the corporate world, Denise joined the company full-time, and in January 2026, she celebrated 30 years with Koopman Lumber.

Learn more about Denise in the July/August issue of *Hardware Retailing*



Scan the QR code to subscribe to *Hardware Retailing* and *Paint & Decorating Retailer* and meet all of our 2026 Top Gun Award honorees.

“But it’s not the work that I do. It’s the work that The Helpful Hardware team does and the leaders in our organization,” David says. “It probably means more to me for our team to be recognized for the work that we’re doing and what we will continue to do as much as it is an individual honor, because it really is about them.”

This people-first mindset has led not only to personal growth but also to growth for one of the fastest growing operations in the industry.

Back to Business

For someone who had no intention of being a part of the independent home improvement channel, David has made a major impact in the industry. During his time earning a criminology degree from Ball State University, David set his sights on becoming a federal agent.

After graduation, David spent his time working at his wife’s family’s hardware store in Indianapolis while he waited through the process to become an agent. In a short time, he moved into the general manager role.

“As I went through that process, it got in my blood,” David says. “Taking care of the customer and being in the hardware space stuck with me.”

David pivoted his career goals and worked with his family in that store for five years. Ultimately, the business closed when competition constricted the market, and he started working in the software business in the automotive segment. David took a job with Epicor, which brought him back into the independent home improvement channel, and would go on to work on the wholesaler side at Do it Best and True Value, ultimately ending up at The Helpful Hardware Company, joining the company as CEO in November 2023.

“I enjoy being back on the retail side,” David says. “It’s where I started, and I certainly missed that side of it.”

Along with being back on the retail side, David appreciates being a part of a business with deep roots.





Future Growth

Building leadership from within **The Helpful Hardware Company** has led to continued success.

The first iteration of The Helpful Hardware Company came in 1918, when the Boling & Bettis General Store opened in Cumming. In 1979, the store joined Ace Hardware and by 2019, the operation had expanded into South Carolina and Tennessee and had eight stores. JPB Partners, a family office, purchased the eight stores and The Helpful Hardware Company. Now, The Helpful Hardware Company operates 21 stores in four states: Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina and Tennessee.

David says he is fortunate to work with a mix of leaders who have not been in the

channel but who have fallen in love with it and some experienced leaders who he's known in different stops in his career.

"I came into the business to guide that next phase of growth," David says. "The past two years I've been here, it's been fantastic with our ability to re-channel the organization, get it focused on growth and build a leadership team that can take it into the future."

Putting People First

Growth for The Helpful Hardware Company has come through a purposeful focus on people, David says.

"We are very focused on where we acquire talent and making sure we are giving people the opportunity to make the best contribution they can to the organization," David says. "More importantly, we look at how we partner with other independents, work in the channel and put good out into the world."

With most of The Helpful Hardware Company's growth coming through acquisition, David says he is keenly aware that they are being entrusted with continuing someone else's legacy.

"If you think about the independent retailer and what they work to build,

they want to ensure their legacy continues on in some form or fashion,” David says. “It has been a challenge for us at times as we grow, but a fun one to be stewards of that legacy and growth.”

The team strives to maintain the identity of the former operator while bringing that operation into The Helpful Hardware Company fold.

“As we’ve grown, I think one of the most successful areas for us is our ability to integrate multiple stores,” David says. “We don’t have any footprints that look the same. We’re in different markets, different niches. And making all those things meld together, it takes an entire village. The Helpful Hardware team does a really good job of perpetuating legacy.”

The company’s focus on people can be seen in customer engagement as well. David says that as the business has grown, leadership realized that the company would need to engage customers differently and turn up the focus on that engagement.

“We were finding at our stores that we were coming in the door the same way every day and walking through the business with blinders on,” he says. “We realized we had an opportunity to challenge our team to look at and think about each store differently.”

That change in mindset led to the implementation of a shift readiness tool managed in SmartSheets. Each day, at the beginning of a shift and during the midday shift change, the store manager or assistant manager walks the store with tablets, identifying areas that need improvement.

Starting from the outside of the building in the parking lot, employees walk through the store, looking at the building through the customer’s eyes and paying attention to areas that need to be cleaned, tidied up or are missing product.

“It’s been amazing to me how much better we’ve gotten at retail because we’re just paying attention to the small details,” David says. “It’s about being accountable and having a process that just ensures that we do it.”



Living a Life of Leadership

David says he has been fortunate to work with a number of excellent leaders in the industry and has had fantastic leaders who have challenged and pushed him to move the needle and embrace servant leadership in his career.

“For me, it always comes back to people and the communities that we serve. I remind our team all the time that it’s about the communities we have the honor to serve. They have a choice, and we want to be the ones they choose,” David says. “When I think about leadership, it’s really about what we do in the communities and the impact we have, whether it’s a customer or an associate.”

Those leadership ideals aren’t kept within the exec team, but rather David wants to be sure they are developing future leaders. Leadership at The Helpful Hardware Company recently launched a pilot program on departmental management, putting together a steering committee of associates to define the various roles in a department. The leadership team outlined several expectations with specific key performance indicators (KPIs) but left it up to the team to fully develop the rest of the program.

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—David Enmark, The Helpful Hardware Company

David says he is fortunate to be able to give employees opportunities outside of their day-to-day tasks and the ability to contribute in a meaningful way to the direction of the company.

“When you give them those opportunities, it becomes more than a job to them. You see those things start to manifest and they see they can have an impact to grow the business,” David says. “Empowering people is really where we’re starting to see them grow.

Several company associates are going through NHPA’s Retail Management Certification Program, and David says the company is continually evolving to open new opportunities for employees to grow.

“We’re constantly pushing our team to think about where they have an opportunity to make an impact,” he says. “We would much rather grow that talent internally than have to go find it.”



Retail Management NHPA Certification Program



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Built for owners and managers in the home improvement industry, NHPA’s Retail Management Certification Program (RMCP) focuses on learning skills to grow store sales and profits in today’s changing retail landscape. Follow in the footsteps of more than 300 retailers who have graduated from the program and brought back practical best practices to their operations. **Learn more at YourNHPA.org/RMCP.**



What the Future Holds

After David joined the company, he offered town hall meetings at every store because he wanted to give every associate a voice. The one common denominator that came out of these meetings—which has become a North Star of sorts for the company—is not failing in front of the customer.

From there, David became focused on empowering employees so they won't fail, making sure each employee has the equipment they need and the skills and training to complete their tasks.

The operation's new focus on not failing in front of customers includes five tenants: Own the moment and take pride in every customer interaction; be prepared and know your products, tools and resources to provide confident answers; stay committed and follow through on promises and ensure every customer leaves satisfied; support each other and collaborate as a team to solve challenges quickly and effectively; and exceed expectations and always aim to deliver more than what the customer anticipates.

Even with these guidelines in place, mistakes will happen, and David looks at those as coachable moments. The goal is to empower employees to make decisions in front of the customer without getting paralyzed.

"We can always clean up behind a mistake," he says. "It's when we don't make a decision, when we stress the customer out, when we're not frictionless in how we work, that's when we have problems."

Not failing in front of the customer is what David says will continue to set independents apart in the home improvement industry.

"When I look at the channel and what it's going to take for us to be successful and the pressure we get from big boxes, we can't fail," he says. "As a channel, I think if we don't start to embrace the empowerment of our people and give them enough rope to be successful, we'll never get there as a channel. And we have to do that to differentiate."

David also believes that independent retailers need to embrace evolving customer expectations to continue to be relevant. Like many retailers, customers of The Helpful Hardware Company are coming in having done research online and are looking for validation that what they've read or watched is correct.

"It's our associate's job to encourage that person to take that step, to tell them that they can do it and that we'll support them along the way," David says. "With technology always evolving, we need to lock arms with the customer and help them get to the finish line." ➔