

# Uncle Hilde's Lumber Outlet:

## "Wicked good deals from around the world"

By Barry Walker

To most New Hampshire and Massachusetts consumers, Tilton-based Uncle Hilde's Surplus Lumber seemed to burst on the scene five years ago with an aggressive round of spots advertising great prices.

But founder and owner Mark Hildebrand had been chewing on the idea for several years. He felt sure that a business offering finished building materials at a discount could actually compete with the "big box" stores. The idea began with his uncle – yes, that Uncle Hilde – who, as an old-time Yankee contractor in Center Harbor, squeezed a nickel until Jefferson screamed and never threw away any leftover materials.

Hildebrand opened his first store in a former lumberyard occupying 13.5 acres, on Route 3 in Tilton, selling good-quality "surplus" finished wood products at prices

the chain stores couldn't touch. Since then, the name has changed to Uncle Hilde's Lumber Outlet, signaling a maturing business plan which includes retail and contractor operations supporting additional stores. The Merrimack store opened at 293 DW Highway in May, 2009 and early last month, the company opened its third store, on Lafayette Road in Seabrook.

"I think we have a good story to tell, with a unique market position, and a different business model and product mix," said Merrimack store manager Tim Brand. "We don't really have titles here, but we all wear a lot of hats." Hildebrand originated the idea when they were co-workers at a wholesale lumber dealer. "Between the two of us, we've been selling building materials for over 60 years," he said.

"We changed the name to get away from the idea

of leftovers or seconds," Brand said. "We buy stock at the best price we can – full truckloads directly from importers, manufacturers and sawmills, occasionally some closeouts. It might be last year's color of a decking product, but every product is first quality. Our focus is on finished materials, all the aesthetic materials on a house, including wood flooring, decking, railings, trim boards and siding."

Although lumber is in the name, Uncle Hilde's doesn't focus on commodity lumber, roofing or plywood. "What we really specialize in is the exotic and domestic hardwood flooring, although we do sell some laminate too." Uncle Hilde's also carries a wide selection of hardwood and composite decking.

The store's policy is strictly "cash and carry." They don't offer installed sales, but they can refer



Photos by JODIE ANDRUSKEVICH

Tim Brand, manager of the Merrimack store.

customers to professional contractors. "We keep our overhead low and offer products at prices that no other stores can compete with," Brand said.

On the other hand, Uncle Hilde's is one of the few distributors who actually keeps what it sells in stock. "Most distributors don't keep inventory," Brand said. "We keep 37 different selections of flooring in Merrimack, with 40 more in Tilton. You can actually see what you're getting! We have over 3,000 sq. ft. in each store dedicated to flooring displays."

Uncle Hilde's retail locations were carefully selected to serve different functions and markets. Tilton has been a great location, because we probably service a much broader area than most

lumber yards. We also sell products all over the country, and in one case as far away as Germany. Our attitude is, where there's a will there's a way, from a few boards to enough for whole buildings."

The approach seems to be working. "People are still maintaining their homes, even in this tough economy," Brand said. "Everyone now has the time to shop for their products. We shine when people have time to shop. Our tag line, 'Wicked Good Deals from Around the World', gets repeated back to us all the time. We pride ourselves on being professional sales people who can educate our customers. We get a ton of notes, letters and emails, from people thanking us for price, selection process, and referrals." Every

testimonial represents a real customer.

With thirteen full-time staff now, they expect to hire several people for their operations in Tilton, Merrimack and Seabrook in the next few months. "We are looking to add one to two stores per year, over the next few years." Uncle Hilde's hires industry veterans to staff their stores. Their current staff averages over 20 years of industry service!

One secret revealed, however: The person in the company logo is not Hildebrand's Uncle Hilde. It's actually from a photograph of his grandfather.

Find out more about Uncle Hilde's at [www.unclehildes.com](http://www.unclehildes.com), or call 603-262-3338.



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Uncle Hilde's Lumber Outlet/Nova