



LISTENING TO THE CUSTOMER Is The KEY To SUCCESS At E.F. SAN JUAN

E.F. San Juan Custom Moulding & Millwork is headquartered in Youngstown, FL.



E.F. San Juan owns trucks to make customer deliveries.



The management team at E.F. San Juan is pictured here left to right: Bryan Kline, office operations manager; Edward San Juan, president; Edward F. San Juan, founder and CEO; Eddie San Juan, manager trainee; and Buddy Czubaj, general manager.

By Scott Dalton

Youngstown, FL—If you have a complicated millwork project that requires attention to detail and a focus on quality workmanship, E.F. San Juan Custom Moulding and Millwork, located here, might be just the company you are looking for.

Edward F. San Juan founded the company in 1976 with a focus on working with people who demanded the best of themselves.

In addition to a wide array of products, Edward A. San Juan, son of Edward F. and president of the company, stressed that customer service has always been central to the company's mission.

"We keep our customers apprised, we call them back, we proactively communicate, and we do what we say we are going to do," Edward said. "It sounds simple, but

I am constantly amazed at how many times when I am the customer I have to call to find out the status of my order and follow up to be sure that everything happens as expected. That drives us crazy and the biggest disappointment in our day is if a customer calls us for job status before we proactively call them – we just don't let that happen."

It takes a carefully coordinated team of 70 individuals to ensure that the only calls are proactive ones, and the staff of E.F. San Juan is up to the challenge. The management team includes Edward and his father, who is both founder and CEO of the company, as well as Mary Kathryn San Juan, who serves as comptroller, Buddy Czubaj, who is the company's manufacturing operations manager, and office operations manager Bryan Kline. Kline is also charged with management of the areas of purchasing, pricing and estimation.

Working together on a 65,000-square-foot campus, the folks at E.F. San Juan use a wide range of species for their products, including FAS1F Poplar, Red and White Oak, Hard and Soft Maple, Select and pecky Cypress, and Select and Better African Mahogany. The company purchases upwards of 500,000 board feet on an annual basis from a variety of mills, distributors, and wholesalers.

"My father challenges our entire team to be the best that we can be and to do the simple things very well," Edward said. "We are not a cult, but I will say we have a cult following of fervent team members who really aim to please our customers and live up to my father's high expectations. I love our people and would have to say that they are our greatest strength and our greatest asset."

Edward said his father originally brokered Hardwoods to Florida furniture manufacturers. He decided he could grow his business by offering value-added manufacturing processes.

"This led to the development of a niche business for us here in



The company purchases over 500,000 board feet annually of Hardwood lumber to manufacture products such as exterior doors.

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—Edward A. San Juan
president,
E.F. San Juan
Custom Moulding and Millwork



Custom interior doors are among the products manufactured by E.F. San Juan.

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Florida,” Edward said. “By 1980, he had built a small sawmill and we were supplying about 80 percent of the Cypress lathe used to make traps for the Florida lobster and stone crab fishery.”

The seasonal business worked well for the younger Edward, as it coincided with his summer vacations, allowing him to get his start in the industry while he was still in his teens.

After graduating from the University of Florida in 1987 with a finance degree and an MBA, Edward began working full-time as a partner in his family’s small business, which began to grow, as both he and his father discovered new opportunities to meet their customers’ needs.

“As years went by we added equipment such as moulders, CNC routers, and a couple of small dehumidification kilns to enable us to add greater value to the Cypress lumber we cut in our mill,” he said. “As our volume increased and the available Cypress log source in our area dwindled, we began to buy larger quantities of Cypress lumber already kiln-dried and in the grades we needed.”

Edward noted that as the company’s capabilities and reputation spread, they found they needed to grow to meet the resulting demand.

“We expanded into the manufacture of more construction-related products to include interior and exterior mouldings, interior and exterior doors, historic restoration windows and doors, and most recently, a line of Florida-approved, impact-rated exterior doors,” he said.

Edward said the demand for the company’s products stems from a design requirement, where beautiful wood grain and color are required, and a functional requirement, where weather resistance is mandatory.

“As a result, we get to manufacture products from a variety of wood species,” he said. “When I ran our Cypress sawmill, I could not wait to open up a face on the next log. You never knew what treasure you would find hidden inside a log that sometimes was a few hundred years old. I would look at the growth rings and imagine what the world was like when I pointed to a random ring on the butt end of a log. I love wood and find it difficult to pick a favorite because each species has its unique attributes—to me all wood is beautiful.”

That passion for wood is reflected in the company’s ongoing commitment to innovative design, developing custom solutions to individual requests on an almost daily basis. It has also remained responsive to trends, listening closely to customer requests, and developing new product lines every three to five years.

Although E.F. San Juan is unique in many regards, Edward hesitates to draw comparisons with other companies, suggesting that the company’s knowledgeable team, unique manufacturing capabilities, ability to consistently meet demanding schedules, and willingness to treat customers as everyone would want to be treated is what brings it success.

“I really do not stress rivalry with our competition. I have always respected anyone who decides to go into business and, as a result, we tend to have amiable relationships with our competition,” he said. “This does not mean that I do not like for our team to win and



E.F. San Juan operates from a 65,000-square-foot facility, which includes warehouses for Hardwood lumber, offices and manufacturing space.

that we do not work hard to be the provider of choice for the products we manufacture and sell, but I rarely dwell on our competition.”

Edward noted that one thing the staff does dwell on is improvement, always looking for better ways to serve their customers, both in terms of products and processes that govern the operation of the company.

“As technology evolves, we look for ways to improve the safety of our operation, improve the quality of our product, and work to the strengths of the technology-savvy younger generation as it relates to our industry,” he said. “Where generations past took wood shop in high school and perhaps a subsequent vocational curriculum in woodworking, today’s work force is generally unexposed to our industry. That said, the younger generation brings a different set of skills to the workplace. Unintimidated by computers, they enable us to bring technology to our industry and our job is to teach them how to apply this technology to woodworking.”

What does the future hold for E.F. San Juan? Edward said the company plans to continue to expand its impact door line and to diversify its manufacturing processes into related woodworking businesses. And, they plan to keep listening.

“With the recent expansion in the construction segment of our economy, we have started to hear a few things from our customers that interest us,” he said. “My eldest son, Eddie, recently joined our company after graduating from the University of Florida with a degree in construction management, so we are not resting on our laurels. We continue to seek opportunities where we can provide solutions and value to our customers and to us, the future looks very bright.”

No matter where the company grows tomorrow, however, there are some principles that will remain part of the bedrock of E.F. San Juan.

“The relationships we have formed harken to a bygone era when a handshake and your word were your bond,” Edward said. “You do not find that very much in business today, but it still exists in our industry and that makes me feel proud and fortunate to be a part of it.” ■

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