



Crescent Springs,
Kentucky



By Chris Long, Editor,
International Door & Operator Industry

DOOR DEALER DIALOG

Overhead Door Company of Northern Kentucky, Crescent Springs, Kentucky ...Adaptation Is One Key to Excelling

As I drove to conduct my interview with Mike Duwel, Scott Siefke, and Dave Willmes, little did I know that I was about to enjoy such a very special treat. As I walked into the reception area adjacent to a very impressive showroom, I was greeted by Dave and introduced to not only Mike and Scott, but also to Ralph Duwel. It was Ralph and Chuck Siefke, the fathers of Mike and Scott, who purchased the company in 1971, and then relocated it from Covington to its current site. Unfortunately, Chuck died in 1989 while on a jobsite. As a result, Scott's mother, Betty, stepped into the business full-time after taking care of the books for years from home.

A true industry veteran, it was most enjoyable to visit with Ralph as the three, equal partners shared their thoughts with me. I could definitely see the pride in his eyes shine as Mike, Scott and Dave responded to my questions. As a side note, when I inquired with Ralph if he missed being involved in the business, he quickly replied that he'd much rather be facing the challenges of an 18-hole golf course. Now, that's my kind of guy!

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How Mike, Scott and Dave ended up being equal partners in the business is a story in itself. Mike and Scott worked for the company while in high school as residential installers and also in the warehouse. After graduating from Miami University (Ohio), Scott achieved his CPA and began a career in public accounting. On the other hand, Mike started working full time for the business directly after graduating from high school. He learned all aspects of the company working in the warehouse, as a residential installer, commercial technician, and as a residential and commercial sales rep.

Dave married into the family when he wed Mike's sister, Sharon. At the time, he worked for a local bank in the purchasing department until he received a promotion and was transferred out of town. Sharon found it difficult to find a teaching position,

and Dave quickly got tired of corporate life. In 1994, he asked Ralph if he could join the company, and soon was working in the warehouse, then as a residential installer, and ultimately a residential sales rep. When Ralph and Betty (Scott's mother) decided to retire in 1997, the three men bought the company, and after several years changed its name to Overhead Door Company of Northern Kentucky to more accurately describe their primary service area and office location.

I hope I haven't confused you to this point. Regardless of how these men became involved in the ownership and management of the business, I found it interesting that only one of them actually had a great deal of door business experience. Actually, of the three entrepreneurs, one was a garage door technician, one a CPA, and one a

banker. The company is certainly not the typical door business from an ownership and management perspective. But, it is definitely a business to learn more about.

Before proceeding to the actual interview, I want to share the company's Mission Statement:

We will strive to provide quality products and unsurpassed customer service to the installation and repair of garage doors, garage door openers, and other related products in our markets.

Furthermore, we will seek to attract, develop, and retain enthusiastic, professional and motivated employees who are dedicated to providing unparalleled customer service to all of our customers.

We are determined to adapt and excel in a competitive marketplace by responding and surpassing customer's needs and requirements in a timely and efficient manner.

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"...people within our market know we are dependable."



Mike Duwel, President

Scott Siefke, Treasurer

Dave Willmes, Secretary

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In many respects this statement is like most others. On the other hand, a few key words stood out to me: Unsurpassed. Unparalleled. Enthusiastic employees. Adapt and excel in a competitive marketplace. One observation from my perspective is that some dealers have been slow to adapt and have most definitely suffered the consequences. In the case of the Overhead Door Company of Northern Kentucky, responding to the need for adaptation has long been a key ingredient to their core mission and success.

On to the interview which I'm sure you'll enjoy.

Chris: Your Mission Statement includes a reference to adapting to the marketplace. Please provide us with examples of this.

Scott: Things have certainly changed a lot in the last 20 years. One of the more recent and significant changes is the fact that more and more women are now making the decision regarding home products including the selection of a garage door and entry door. We tend to cater to a different clientele than we did in past years. With technology the way it is, there is just so much more you can do. If you don't quickly and effectively adapt, you're going to find yourself way behind.

Dave: You have to adapt almost immediately nowadays. When we first started we were just plugging away and happy with the results. However, competition changes, product changes, the needs of customers change, and you have to constantly re-evaluate these things. Customer applications are completely different than just two years ago. Their expectations are much higher and dealers must adapt to that.

Chris: There is no question that buyers of our products and services are changing how they do business. Many are much more sophisticated while others remain to be price-oriented. Would you concur?

Mike: There is no doubt there are buyers who are only price driven. However, I think that being a professional door dealer, and one that has invested in making this a reality rather than just a promotional theme, opens opportunities for us to reach buyers who are seeking product quality and door dealer integrity. We've been here for more than half a century and pride ourselves in that all of our employees are paid by the hour. We're not here to just slap a door in a hole, but to install a quality door as if it were our own. We sell our service and our reputation.

Dave: Mike is right. We want to provide a quality product and service, and do what we say we're going to do. It isn't unusual for us to be called by a customer who selected a dealer with a lower price, only to find that it is not working properly. In addition, one neighbor shares with another that they selected us and were very pleased with our service. For customers who are not only interested in initial cost, but also down the road service, we have a powerful message. We will be there to serve them long after the fly-by-night and part-time dealer goes out of business. We have developed a quality reputation and people within our market know we are dependable. If our customers have a problem, they know we will be there to help them. For those who select less, they will receive less. Ultimately it is a decision the buyer makes...somewhat a 'pay him now' and 'call us later' theme.

Scott: I would add that we must always be prepared to inform our customers what it means to them to do business with a professional, an IDA member, an IDEA accredited dealer that utilizes IDEA certified technicians. We always emphasize that one shouldn't take it for granted the value of doing business

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"...we must be available when the customer is."



“Always remember, Cash is King!”

with a qualified professional. We have been very fortunate that because of our long standing reputation in the community, our customers know that we have high quality employees. As a result, our customers trust our technicians and staff and can turn to us for their service work and new construction needs.

Chris: Regarding door technicians, how do you instill your quality mission within their daily performance?

Scott: I won't say that it is necessarily easy, but we've been able to hire good people with good values. Because of this, it is almost a natural, inner trait that drives them to serve customers with integrity and with a high regard for our value system. Some applicants come to us with good skills, but are lacking on the values side. We hire good people and teach them to be good technicians. We can't necessarily teach ethical behavior. When a new hire comes on board, they work with one of our experienced guys no matter what the level of experience they have. We want everyone to perform in accordance with the standards we've established during the past six decades.

Dave: Each morning we are with the techs as they load their trucks. We're talking with them about the jobs they're preparing to do. We feel this is important and the techs really do appreciate it. As a side note, we think it is important that when on a service call our techs share with our customers their diagnosis of the work to be performed. What, why, and the options available. The more the customer understands, the more they appreciate what we are doing for them. It not only creates a bond with the customer, it also enhances their level of trust in our people and company.

Mike: To some it might seem to be unnecessary, but when the three of us are out in the 95 degree heat, helping the guys load their vehicles, it conveys a strong message of support. Some who may have come from another company have never experienced

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Wayne Noble (Residential Sales)
Lisa Schlosser (Residential Sales)



(back) Katie Turner (Accounting),
(front) Edna Hale (Dispatching)



Amie Ortlieb (Accounting)



Ray Gerdes (Commercial Sales)



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ownership that is willing to get their hands dirty. The proof is in the results. We don't have to seek new employees...because of our reputation, they actually are seeking us. Our retention is extraordinary which translates into continuity in attitude, professional performance, and of utmost importance, customer satisfaction.

Chris: You're a long-term IDA member. Has your membership provided a solid ROI?

Mike: It most definitely has. We've benefited significantly from the annual Expo seminars and the Expo trade show. Without question, the IDA magazine contains valuable information for our personnel.

Scott: Putting on my CPA hat, I can tell you that the annual IDA Dealer-Fit survey provides us with a benchmark as to where we stand compared to companies that are similar to us. The survey allows us to review areas of our company that need to be improved and establish a business plan to strengthen these aspects of our business. And, it is a free service for IDA members. To us, the program is huge.

Dave: I'd say that the information discussed in the IDA magazine, and the resources that IDA provides are specific to our industry, and therefore more useful than other organizations. The contacts that we make through IDA are extremely important so that we can discuss specific issues related to effectively managing a garage door company.

Chris: Dave, your company is IDEA Accredited and a number of your door techs are IDEA certified. How has this benefited your company?

Dave: IDEA provides us a method to train our technicians to industry standards and procedures. Internal training is still the most important method to train our technicians, but IDEA testing allows a technician to validate their product and job knowledge to industry standards. IDEA accreditation and certified technicians are useful sales tools when working with a customer. Every garage door company says that they provide high quality products and services, but we can actually walk into a customer's home or business and prove

it in writing. With IDEA accreditation, a customer understands that we represent professionalism and will stand behind our products and services. Coupled with the IDA Code of Business Practices, IDEA accreditation and certification provide our customers with the satisfaction and security of working with a true professional.

Chris: What primary business issues does your company currently face?

Scott: Where do I begin? The list is quite long. Lead Paint (RRP), PCI compliance, product inflation and pressure from our competitors to reduce pricing, an ever changing economy, using technology to our advantage, meeting our customer's changing needs and expectations, fly-by-night door guys.

Chris: During your 64 years of business, the industry has changed dramatically. What changes do you see for our future?

Scott: We are already realizing many changes including the consolidation of manufacturers, and the influx of

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"We haven't forgotten to focus on our core business..."



“...To us, the program (IDA DEALER-FIT) is huge.”

manufacturing products from outside the United States. I think the biggest change has been and will continue to be technology. How consumers buy products and how we sell our products and services is rapidly changing. The challenge we all face is how to harness this change and use technology to our advantage.

Dave: Garage door products have become more and more sophisticated, and the trend will continue. The range of garage door designs and products continue to increase. It is very difficult to anticipate where the garage door industry will be in 10-20 years.

Mike: Not necessarily an industry change, but on the commercial side we are being asked to do much more than install a door. In many cases, a contractor wants us to actually modify the wall to accommodate the new door. We're now involved in masonry work, framing, and more.

Chris: Dealers are always curious as to how other dealers market their companies and products. Care to share a sales tip?

Mike: A couple of simple, but effective things quickly come to mind. I would say one should listen to their customers, and strive to always exceed their expectations. Dealers should invest in developing relationships with their customers so that they are recognized as being a business they

can rely on to be a problem solver and not just a garage door salesman.

Chris: I noticed in your showroom that you display awnings. Do you believe in diversifying your product line?

Dave: I would suggest that we have established a business model that takes advantage of our company's strengths, and our competitor's weaknesses. We have diversified our products and services while focusing on what we know and understand. The trend in our market has been for garage door companies to diversify their products and services, but we have been successful in positioning ourselves as being the experts in garage doors. We haven't forgotten to focus on our core business and product lines, and customers.

Chris: Scott, being the Treasurer and a CPA, would you share an operations tip with the readers?

Scott: Always remember, Cash is King! I would caution against taking money out of the company at year's end in the form of bonuses as an example. It is critical to put money back into the company so that if the economy does go south, you aren't cash poor. Simple, but many dealers don't prepare for difficult times until it is too late.

Chris: Your personnel are truly up-beat. What do you do to maintain this motivation?

Dave: We try to treat everyone the way we would want to be treated. We remember the fact that all of us have families.

Chris: As a door dealer has anything amusing happened to you?

Mike: For sure. Difficult to perhaps believe, but a customer came home one night and found that their garage door had been pushed in from the outside. She was afraid that someone had broken into the house and immediately called the police. The police quickly arrived and entered the home with flashlights and guns drawn. One police officer carefully entered the garage only to find a dead turkey on the ground in front of the garage door. That night the customer called us for an estimate to repair the garage door. When the sales rep arrived on the job that morning, he found that the door was dented and pushed in between the bottom and lock section, but was still in the track. When he entered the garage, he found a chalk line on the ground around the area where the dead turkey was found (just like you would see on TV). Not knowing if the customer's tale was true, we called the police department later in the afternoon to verify the story. The story was true...a 32-pound turkey had flown into the garage door and ended up dead on the other side of the door. We were told the police officer didn't think anyone would believe him so he took photographs of the dead turkey and posted them inside the police department.

Chris: As our industry continues to evolve, what do you think will be the next major change?

Scott: We often discuss this among ourselves. We think access systems will

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Their sign can be seen from I-75. Over 20,000 cars pass by it everyday.

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“You have to adapt almost immediately these days.”

be computerized and integrated with other appliances and computer systems inside the customer's home or business. A garage door company will also be integrated with the access system to monitor performance and to perform standard maintenance and repairs.

Chris: Describe your advertising program.

Dave: We are quite diversified when it comes to advertising our company. We utilize the Internet, local coupon magazines, Yellow Pages, our expressway sign, word of mouth, door stickers and yard signs.

Chris: What do you do in your business that is unique?

Mike: Our technicians are broken out as residential and commercial, but they are IDEA certified and fully trained to do both installs and service. This extensive cross training gives us flexibility with scheduling. We can also assure our customers that they will receive consistent service regardless of who is dispatched to the call. Our technicians then have the opportunity to do different types of work throughout the work week, therefore reducing burnout.

Dave: We are offering more flexible sales and service hours including 24-hour emergency response to our customers by staggering our start times for sales reps and technicians. This also gets our trucks out faster in the morning because of less congestion in the warehouse. Times are changing at least in our market. No longer do we tell the customer when we will serve them, but rather they tell (demand) us when they will be available and that includes evenings and Saturdays. People are not necessarily interested in taking off work in the

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859-341-6846 or (513) 347-0008

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Association Links

IDA International Door Association

BBB

FBA HOME BUILDERS ASSOCIATION

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Just across the Ohio River is
the Cincinnati Red's
Great American Ballpark

Dealer Snapshot

- **Overhead Door Company of Northern Kentucky**
2571 Ritchie Avenue
Crescent Springs, KY 41017
859 341-6646
Fax: 859 341-1509
Email: salesteam@ohdcvg.com
Website: www.OverheadDoorOnline.com
- **Primary Personnel:**
Mike Duwel, President (Owner)
Commercial
Scott Siefke, Treasurer (Owner)
Accounting
Dave Willmes, Secretary (Owner)
Residential
- **Number of Years in Business: 64**
- **Primary Products:**
Garage Doors and Openers
Dock Equipment
Commercial Steel Entry Doors
Retractable Awnings
Residential Entry Doors
Gate Openers
High Speed Doors
- **Primary Product Providers:**
Overhead Door Corporation
McGuire • Rytec • Sunesta
Steelcraft • Therma-Tru

- **Number of Personnel: 24**
- **Number of Trucks: 16**
- **Personnel Recognitions**
Sanctioned IDEA Train-the-Trainer
Rick Allen
Jim Milles
IDEA Certified
Rick Allen (Residential)
Richard Ehlman (Residential)
Greg Fields (Residential)
Paul King
(Commercial – Rolling Steel)
Jim Milles (Residential)
Dave Phelps
(Commercial – Rolling Steel)
Jack Roberts (Residential)
Rick Ryan (Residential)
Ryan Welch
(Commercial – Sectional)
- **Company Recognitions**
IDA Member and IDEA Accredited
Overhead Door Corporation Eagle
Award (9 awards)

“Our retention is extraordinary...”

middle of the day. Bottom line, we must be available when the customer is. It is simply a sign of the times.

Mike: I would mention that we rarely demand that our employees work overtime. However, they do understand that things need to get done and overtime is necessary. This is one area where we truly differ from our competitors.

Scott: Another unique thing that we recently implemented is the use of GPS. The GPS system has offered us many advantages including vehicle maintenance, dispatching, easy to follow directions for the techs and project scheduling. If we receive one more call a week as a result of GPS, it is worth the investment. Although there was some resistance by employees initially, it quickly became a non-issue.

Chris: If you could select three attributes of your company that have made you successful, what would they be?

Mike: We were trained well by our parents (in-law), and understand the garage door industry so that we can be responsive to our customer’s needs. Our technicians, sales staff, and support staff are the best in the market. We focus on basic business fundamentals such as being fiscally conservative and customer service oriented.

