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Greg, left, and Pete Kirschling stand in front of a stockpile of Tyvek brand housewrap. The company has an exclusive distribution contract for a large area of Northeastern Wisconsin and Upper Michigan. The Business News photo by J.A. Robb

## Lumber dealer now handles “no lumber at all”

70-year-old Green Bay company has grown by selling such things as HomeWrap, insulation

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Lumber Dealers Supply no longer deals in wood products like it did in its early years, but the 70-year-old Green Bay firm is certainly all wrapped up in them.

More specifically, area homes are all wrapped up in the company's prize product — DuPont's Tyvek HomeWrap. A drive through any growing neighborhood reveals why this product is a key driver behind the company's 50-percent sales increase since 1999.

Peter Kirschling, president of the company owned by the Kirschling family since 1951, said timing and relationships figured prominently in landing an exclusive distribution contract for about a 50-county area of Northeastern Wisconsin and Upper Michigan.

“DuPont had developed this product in the late 1970s, but they didn't really know what to do with it,” Kirschling said. “A consultant they were working with was a friend of ours in the industry, and he helped DuPont contact distributors about carrying this product.”

Lumber Dealers Supply would order two or three pallets at a time in the early 1980s, going through about 200 rolls per year. Today, that amount flows through the company's warehouse

to retail lumber yards on a weekly basis.

Needless to say, the Kirschlings have bought that consultant a dinner or two since then.

“We have three specialists that devote most of their attention to that single product line,” he said. “We don't sell directly to the builders, but we do work with them on proper installation and how to make a home more efficient.”

Tyvek is applied to the exterior of a home's plywood frame to make it airtight and keep moisture out of the walls. Kirschling compares the effect to wearing a windbreaker over a knit sweater in that one without the other is unsatisfactory.

Lumber Dealers Supply was in the right place at the right time to benefit when the home building boom hit high gear. Sales are now slowing due to the high inventory of new homes on the market.

Other energy efficiency products are also contributing to the company's bottom line, including DuPont Flashing Systems such as FlexWrap for the bottom of windows, and AtticWrap.

In addition to the popular line of DuPont Building Innovations products, CertainTeed insulation, GeoDeck composite decking, Yardcrafters vinyl railing systems, and Goosen exterior millwork are some of the other products offered by Lumber Dealers Supply.

“Our name can be very confusing,”

Kirschling said. “The way I explain what we do is we sell our products to the lumber dealers. We're not into the commodities, and we handle no lumber at all.”

Founded by Otto Schueler and Eddie Fairbrother in 1936, Lumber Dealers Supply originally served the construction industry in leased space on South Broadway as a jobber of roofing, plywood, insulation board, and millwork.

Alex Kirschling, Peter's father, began managing the business in 1948, and by 1951 he had bought out Schueler and Fairbrother to become sole proprietor. The elder Kirschling turned the daily management over to his oldest son, John, upon his retirement in 1971, and sons Bob (1973) and Peter (1976) came on board shortly afterward to form a team that ran the business together until 1999.

Peter Kirschling took over as president in 1999 upon his brother's retirement, and Bob retired in 2001. The only other family member actively involved in the current operation of the business is John's son, Greg Kirschling, who serves as vice president.

“The key to our success is taking care of our customers,” Peter Kirschling said. “The top of our organizational chart does not have the president, but rather the customer. Treat the customer well, and success will follow.”

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