

Draperies & Window Coverings

**BRUCE
HEYMAN**

**Retailer
of the Year**

page 24

**SAFETY
ISSUE**

**INSIDE:
AWARENESS,
PRODUCTS,
IDEAS**

**Safe
Haven**

page 40

**Safe and
Sound**

page 28

**Safe At
Home**

page 32

Where do you begin when recognizing an industry professional as the Retailer of the Year? The number of years in business? Sales volume? Range of products? Services provided? Yes, all of that can come into play. But in presenting Bruce Heyman, Metropolitan Window Fashions, as our first Retailer of the Year, *Draperies & Window Coverings* can begin back in December 2001 when Heyman, then the incoming president of the Window Coverings Association of America (WCAA), was the cover story.

Heyman's term as WCAA president only partly illustrates his involvement in the industry as a whole and the association's goal of increasing professionalism at every level. He also was instrumental in starting WCAA's New Jersey chapter and has served on the association's national board of directors since 1988—including his four years as president. Look a little deeper and you will see that same commitment to his business, his employees and the communities in which his (now) four locations serve.

When we first profiled Heyman (see *D&WC*, December 2001, page 24), he was the third-generation president of Fabricland Interiors, North Plainfield, NJ, and had recently purchased a second location (formerly Nassaus Window Fashions in Paramus, NJ). What has come about since then only serves to support Heyman as *Draperies & Window Coverings*' 2007 Retailer of the Year.

MAKE IT HAPPEN

The first of this month, Heyman closed the deal on Metropolitan Window Fashions' fourth location, this one formerly Martin Interiors in Wayne, NJ. As with the company's other stores (which also includes an Upper West Side store in Manhattan), it will offer an extensive collection of custom designed and ready-made window treatments, shades and blinds, decorative hardware product lines and feature beautiful displays.

Also like his other stores, the Wayne location will serve a local customer base with most business, Heyman finds, coming from within a 10 to 15 mile radius of the store. "In this day and age some customers prefer to shop at big, mega-malls and superstores, but a lot of customers prefer dealing with family operations, so one of our key messages is family-owned since 1934," he says. "There is room for good independents, especially in businesses that demand service. Our focus is on friendly, personalized service and our expertise in window fashions and fabrics encourage customer loyalty and repeat visits."

Like the others, this newest location also will be branded Metropolitan Window Fashions, a process Heyman began about two years ago soon after opening the New York City store. At that time he felt the 73-year-old family business name, Fabricland, didn't quite "say" window coverings like he wanted it to. He tried adding "Interiors" to the name, but with the opening of the Amsterdam Ave. store in New York City, "We had to pick a name for the future," he explains. Metropolitan Window Fashions said it just right.

With a staff of 100 employees, Metropolitan Window Fashions features shop-at-home decorating expertise along with in-store customer service professionals. Heyman depends on his highly trained



The first re-branded store, the New York City location—at 700-square-feet—also showed Heyman that with the right customers he didn't always need a large showroom.



Custom window treatments sales have grown 700 percent over the last 12 years and now, combined with all window coverings sales, top 80 percent of the total business.



Beautiful room-vignette displays with lots of product samples are features of Metropolitan Window Fashions locations.

and knowledgeable staff as his support network to "make it happen."

"Behind me it's our managers, it's our sales associates, it's our support staff and beyond that it's our partnership with our vendors—they give us tremendous support—and it's product knowledge so that when a customer does speak to a sales associate these people know what they are talking about." All the beautiful in-store displays mean nothing, he says, if a customer encounters a salesperson who doesn't know what he or she is talking about.

"Great service is our mission and we train our staff to forge close bonds with the customers they serve," Heyman says. "The old saying, 'The educated consumer is your best customer' is so true. It's somebody who understands that we're going to come out there, we're going to do a good job and we're going to stand behind it. It's a complicated product," he adds.

The result of these efforts is the company's loyal and repeat customers. "It's true and we see it every day," Heyman says. "The mothers and the daughters come in and it's fun. We've got employees that have been here 30, 40 years and customers will come in say, 'You hung my draperies 30 years ago.' And some of our people are so brilliant and smart, they'll remember the homes!"

Heyman also reaches out to the professional interior designer. The company works closely with many interior designers "who prefer to use our expertise for their clients' window treatment needs," he says. The stores offer trade discounts to interior designers and decorators, many of whom use the business as their window treatment workroom.

IT'S ABOUT THE COMMUNITY

Heyman also carries on a long tradition of community service that began with his grandparents. "I remember when I was a kid my grandparents had a plaque in their home from the NAACP—it was a very impressive plaque," he recalls. "As I got older I understood [the significance]. So they started it, and my parents were always doing something—we were making hats for kids, we were making quilts for babies—we were always doing something and always involving the customers. It's fun. It's nice. It's about the community. Right now one of our big things is the Fabric Trade-in, which is really fun. It's a big thing for the customers. It's so exciting, they get to bring all their old fabric in and we actually give them store credit. They can buy anything, and we end up with just tons of fabric to donate. We've got a list of maybe 25 organizations that do everything with it."

Over the years, the Metropolitan Window Fashions' staff and customers have created and donated clothing and home furnishings products for many organizations. A brief list would include:

- Operation Sweet Dreams—to create soft pillows for soldiers in the Middle East.
- Project Linus—to create quilts for AIDS babies in local hospitals.
- Clothing for Kids—to collect and create dresses and pants for underprivileged children in Appalachia.
- Warm Up America—to knit and create hats and scarves for needy children.
- Coats for Kids—to collect and donate hundreds of coats to needy area children.
- Crafts for Kids—to coordinate volunteer efforts to spend time in



Heyman relies on his professional, knowledgeable network of employees to "make it happen."

area hospitals doing craft and sewing projects with patients.

Last year, a donation from Metropolitan Window Fashions provided all the turkeys for the North Plainfield (NJ) Salvation Army's Thanksgiving dinner. The company also has created a Textile and Design Award, each year issuing \$1,500 in gift certificates to the most talented design students in five area high schools. The company's stores also have been open for free design seminars for community groups and for free tours—specifically dress fabrics and the sewing department—to youngsters beginning at age eight in the Brownie and Girl Scout program.

But let's not forget the successful business Heyman runs. Established in 1934 as a fabric store, custom window treatments once were only 12 percent of total sales. Today, window treatments top 80 percent of total sales and custom treatments represent 60 percent of sales having increased 700 percent over the past 12 years.

So it all adds up: years in business, sales, service, dedication to the industry and dedication to the employees and communities that go hand-in-hand. Bruce Heyman, Metropolitan Window Fashions, D&WC's Retailer of the Year. ●