

Committing to the Family Business



● Seminole Décor Center in Springfield, Mo., has expanded several times over the past several years.

Following in his in-laws' footsteps, Dan Rosebrough has made the necessary decisions to keep Seminole Décor Center strong

Dan Rosebrough knew something was up when his father-in-law, Francis Cates, gave him a drill for his birthday. For some time, Francis had been trying to convince Dan to join the family business, Seminole Décor Center Inc. in Springfield, Mo. This was proving to be a tough sell, however, since Dan had a degree in Golf Course Management from Kansas State University. He was working at a golf course in the nearby vacation mecca of Branson, and he certainly never envisioned himself embarking on a career path that involved selling paint. "I didn't even know the difference between a latex and an oil-based paint," Dan recalls.

You have to go back a few years to see how this career was set in motion—1991, to be precise, the year that Dan moved to Springfield. Within a couple of years, he met Alison. She was working in the paint store



● Dan and Alison Rosebrough with Alison's mother, Sharon Cates, stand in the paint department of Seminole Décor Center in Springfield, Mo. In front are Dan and Alison's three children, from left, Grace, Christopher and Rebecca.

with her father, Francis and her mother, Sharon. Dan and Alison got married in 1993, and suddenly the family paint store business loomed in the picture, almost as if it were another in-law.

Then, Francis gave him that fateful birthday gift. "I'm sure he had ulterior motives when he bought me that drill," Dan says good-naturedly. Circumstances certainly suggested that was the case. The manager of Seminole Décor's satellite store in Camden, Mo., had just quit. Therefore, there was no one

available to install the blinds and other window coverings that were being sold in that vacation-home community on the picturesque Lake of the Ozarks—no one, of course, until Dan took the hint and decided to join the business after all. He took his trusty drill and began installing blinds, first in Camden and then also in Springfield.

"When I started, I was basically involved with blinds, wallpaper and inventory management," Dan recalls. "I wasn't allowed to tint a gallon of paint that entire first year. I think Francis thought I would have just ended up in the tint room, and he wanted me to learn the entire business."

Now, a little more than a decade later, Dan heads the paint store business that his in-laws had purchased in 1973. For a while, Seminole Décor had five family members active in the business: Francis, Sharon, Dan, Alison and Brian, Alison's brother. Now, it's just Dan and Sharon. Francis died in 2003 after a battle with cancer. Alison stopped working at the store to become a stay-at-home mom to her and Dan's three children, and Brian left the business to pursue other opportunities.

Dan was named general manager of the corporation in 1998. In the past



● The staff of Seminole Décor Centers includes, from left, Dan Rosebrough, Kathy Endicott, Sharon Cates, John Bucher, Paul Corson, Jody Fleischman, Carina Totten, Chris Hamilton and Chad Harmon.

several years, he has made several adjustments to keep the business strong. Other independent paint stores in town had gone out of business, and the ownership wanted to ensure that the same fate did not happen to Seminole Décor Center. The managerial moves were effective, and the business is now one of the few remaining independent paint stores in the Springfield market.

One of Dan's first considerations was to hire personnel who had the background and expertise to help better the business. One of the key people he brought into the business was Sean Bayne, who serves as the store's general manager. Sean came to the business in 1998 after working for a major retail paint store chain. "Sean is my right-hand," Dan reports. "He helps me with employee matters, building the contractor business—virtually every aspect of the business."

Dan also was responsible for bringing in Kathy Endicott in the position of office manager. He ensured that the design center was in good

hands with the hiring of design center manager Jody Fleischman. The paint department, meanwhile, runs smoothly with such personnel as John Bucher, Paul Corson and John Corson, who help customers in the store, and Dave Nelson, who came on board recently as outside sales manager. Additional customer service for the design center and the paint department is offered by Melissa Sieve and Carina Totten.

With this capable staff in place, Dan has been able to make the necessary shifts in business

to remain competitive. For instance, it was Sean's company-owned store experience that helped Seminole Décor shift its emphasis more toward the contractor and commercial side of the business. "When I first got here, the business broke down as 60-percent retail and 40-percent contractor," he says. "Now, that's totally flipped to about 60-percent contractor and 40-



● Sharon Cates has added faux-finishing touches throughout Seminole Décor, which helps attract customers and draw attention to the store.

percent retail. Sean was the one who really helped us become strong in the contractor market. He understood what was needed to serve that market."

This flip was necessitated by the growing competition for the consumer's dollar from the big-box stores in the marketplace. The regional and national company-owned stores in the market, meanwhile, presented strong competition in the contractor and commercial/industrial sectors. In order to

'Independent dealers frequently feel as though they are all alone out there, but being a member of a buying group helps you feel less alone.'

compete, Seminole Décor had to make adjustments in its product lineup and pricing. Fortunately, the company's major paint supplier had a strong selection of professional products with a diverse color palette. The quality of the products, coupled with a more attractive pricing structure, gave Seminole the ammunition it needed to make a strong play for new contractor and commercial business.

The outside sales effort provided by Dave Nelson puts Seminole Décor in a good position to obtain new contractor and commercial business. Dave previously worked as a painting contractor for a local door company and thus has great familiarity with lacquers and stains. He typically calls on busi-

nesses within 15 miles of the store. "There is so much business here that we don't need to go any further," Dan reports.

In the past several years, Dan also has been involved in the restructuring of Seminole Décor's satellite store strategy. In 2001, he and his in-laws decided to close the Camdenton store, since the 80-mile distance from Springfield made it difficult to manage. Another site in Springfield, which was mainly used as a warehouse, was closed in 2002.

However, now Dan is moving forward with a renewed strategy of store expansion with the opening of a new 3,000-square-foot satellite store in Ozark, Mo., about 15 minutes south of the Springfield location. "We're moving south because that is where the growth is," Dan reports. "Ozark is in Christian County, which is the third fastest-growing county in Missouri."

Dan has given the important responsibility of overseeing this new satellite store to right-hand man Sean. With the operation of the Ozark store going so



● A second Seminole Paint store was recently opened in Ozark, Mo., south of the main store.

smoothly, Dan is eyeing another Christian County town as another potential store site. "My goal is to have a third store in the Springfield area within the next five years," he says.

Meanwhile, the main store in Springfield has expanded over the past few decades. When Francis and Sharon bought the business in 1973, it was about 2,500 square feet. However, as tenants from the surrounding businesses moved out, they were able to take over additional space. Now, the store encompasses a total of 6,000 square feet. The paint department comprises approximately 90 percent of the company's sales and most of the



● Shown at the new Ozark store are, from left, general manager Sean Bayne, John Corson and Melissa Sieve.

space as well. There's also the design center, which encompasses wallcoverings and window coverings.

Another key reason for Seminole Décor's success is an emphasis on faux and decorative painting products, which sets the store apart from the competition and helps build business. "A lot of other paint stores send customers here for faux," Dan reports. "Faux finishing brings in good clientele, and then they end up buying all of their paint here."

The key figure in the company's success with faux products is Sharon. She does demonstrations in the store



● The tint room at the main store in Springfield, Mo., is a busy place.

and also speaks at a variety of local venues, ranging from the art museum to the library to a Women's Health Retreat sponsored by the local St. John's Hospitals. She also teaches classes at the store in conjunction with Ozark Technical School, which awards participants with Continuing Education Units. Her faux-finishing expertise was given an even higher profile this summer, when she was featured in a local TV segment that was broadcast live from the Springfield store.

Setting itself apart from the competition is nothing new for Seminole Décor Center, however. Sharon reports that this was Francis' strategy from the beginning. "We were always able to predict what the next big trends would be and get their first," says Sharon, explaining that Francis constantly took the time to explore what consumers want-

ed, whether it was expert color-matching or faux finishing. "He'd always say, 'That's it—that's what we're doing next.' Then we'd go ahead and do it before anyone in town was doing it."

Francis' legacy to the business also is characterized by the owners' commitment to the business, which sets an example for the rest of the employees. "The owners are present in the business on a daily basis," Sharon explains. "We feel that's a key reason for our success. There is a work ethic. People show up. Francis established a sense of integrity, and that still stands today."

Dan concurs and follows his in-laws' philosophy of being an involved, participatory owner. "I really feel it's important for me to be here," he stresses. "If I wasn't down here working my counter, we wouldn't be where we are today."

Another factor in the business' success is its membership in the Mid-South buying group. As Dan ex-



● From left: Carina Totten, Sharon Cates and Jody Fleischman confer with each another in the design center of the Springfield store.

plains, the buying group not only helps members buy products at a more attractive price but also affords valuable networking opportunities. "Independent dealers frequently feel as though they are all alone out there, but being a member of a buying group helps you feel less alone," Dan explains. "All of us have the same problems, but everyone has different solutions. If we can learn from one other, then everybody benefits." ■



● The paint department at Seminole Décor's main store has strong appeal to the contractor trade.