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Handle And Block Companies

MOVING FORWARD

As Sales Improve During Pandemic

By Rick Mullen | Broom, Brush & Mop Associate Editor

COVID-19 has permeated all aspects of business worldwide. Companies supplying wooden and metal handles, blocks and other related products have their own unique challenges in doing business during the pandemic.

Broom, Brush & Mop recently spoke with executives from seven such companies who shared how their respective businesses have adjusted to these volatile and unpredictable times.

For the past century, family owned and operated **H. Arnold Wood Turning, Inc., of Tarrytown, NY**, has supplied wood parts, including broom and mop handles, brush blocks, dowels, turnings, CNC parts and various other wood components. The company celebrated its 100th year in business in 2019.

Tarrytown is located on the eastern bank of the Hudson River, about 25 miles north of midtown Manhattan in New York City. When COVID-19 was declared a pandemic in mid-March, New York City was one of the first hard hit areas in the country.

“When the pandemic first hit, we took a proactive approach. Where it was appropriate, we transitioned our administrative offices to work from home,” **H. Arnold Wood Turning Vice President and fourth generation co-owner Jonathan Arnold** said. “We were lucky. We did not have to close at all, and are grateful the wood products industry was deemed essential. Our company is very diverse in the industries and product lines we supply. We saw some verticals that were affected greater than others. Our handle business, in particular, happened to increase greatly, as many of the products are used in the sanitation and cleaning industries.”

H. Arnold Wood Turning also offers custom architectural components, including, but not limited to, wood balusters, finials, newel posts, spindles, and columns.

Secondary operations such as rounding, pointing, chamfering, drilling, tenoning, slotting, ferruling and finishing can be provided on wood dowels. Wood turnings can be manufactured plain or finished to the customer’s exacting standards. Finishes for wood dowels and wood turnings can be dipped, sprayed or tumbled and

in a variety of finish types and colors. Wood boxes and crates are produced in a number of styles, including slide lid and hinged lid, which can be customized, according to the company.

Herman Arnold and his son, **William**, founded the company in 1919 in Brooklyn, NY, manufacturing turnings. Now, the company is led by Herman Arnold’s grandson, **Bruce Arnold**, and his great-grandson, **Jonathan Arnold**. Other key family members at the company include **Melissa Arnold Friedman** and **Ann Arnold**.

One of the first orders of business at H. Arnold Wood Turning, when the severity of COVID-19 became apparent, was to put in place procedures and guidelines to help ensure employees remained as safe and healthy as possible while at work.

“We are following guidelines set by the CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention),” Jonathan Arnold said. “We

have put up protective barriers where social distancing of six feet or greater is not possible. **In the plants, machinery was reorganized or relocated, allowing production to continue with no delays. We also provide PPE (personal protective equipment) supplies to all employees.**”

Employees are also encouraged to take a proactive approach to their own health and well-being. For example, if an employee is not feeling well or exhibiting any symptoms of coronavirus, he/she should not come to work.

“Most people are adhering to the guidelines. They are wearing masks and practicing social distancing,” Jonathan Arnold said. “Additionally, with the new challenge of at-home schooling, **we have worked with**

employees who are parents of young children to come up with creative scheduling, flexible work hours and work from home scenarios.”

For its raw materials, H. Arnold Wood Turning concentrates on using domestic hardwood and softwood species, including pine, poplar, sycamore and some beech.

“Despite some pressures on raw material prices due to the ongoing trade war and tariff situation, pricing has continued to remain stable,” Jonathan Arnold said. “However, our handle business has shifted to the use of more pine, compared to the hardwoods.”



Jonathan Arnold

Because of the reluctance of some U.S. retailers to sell items made with wood from the Amazon rainforest, H. Arnold Wood Turning has seen an uptick in its broom and mop sales. The recent fires in the Amazon rainforest and the clearing of the forest without replacing cut trees has some U.S. retailers balking at Brazilian hardwood.

The social distancing aspect of COVID-19 has caused many companies to adjust how they interact with customers, as personal one-on-one visits have been eliminated or reduced.

“We have implemented many more video conferencing tools than ever before, which many customers have used as well,” Jonathan Arnold said. “That has actually allowed us more face-to-face contact with customers, which has impacted the already great relationships we have with our clients, and has proven to be a valuable tool that we will continue to use in the future.”

While living with COVID-19 has its own unique set of issues to overcome, one of H. Arnold Wood Turning’s challenges pre-dates the pandemic.

“I think our biggest challenge today is the same as it has been in the past — finding qualified salespeople to join our team,” Jonathan Arnold said. “We are always on the lookout for talented individuals.”

It is becoming apparent to many that COVID-19 is not going away anytime soon. So, what will life at H. Arnold Wood Turning be like moving forward?

“As I mentioned, our diversification allows us to supply numerous industries with a variety of product lines. In general,

some customers have been greatly affected by the pandemic and have had to rethink their entire business model. We are working with those customers, helping to support and implement the changes they need,” Jonathan Arnold said. “In other cases, some of our customers have been inundated with orders due to the new habits of consumers. We will continue with the same good communication as we had prior to COVID-19, allowing us to make the necessary changes to meet their needs.

“Here at H. Arnold Wood Turning, we are positioned well, due to our diversification and ability to identify and target relevant industries and products. We feel the handle industry has been very good to us, and has a bright future.

“As horrible as the pandemic has been for our country, businesses and individuals, it has made us evaluate numerous processes, procedures, inventory levels, raw material suppliers, tools for communicating, and, most importantly, meeting customers’ needs. I feel we are a stronger company today than we were prior to COVID-19, and are even better than before in meeting the requirements of our customers.”

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