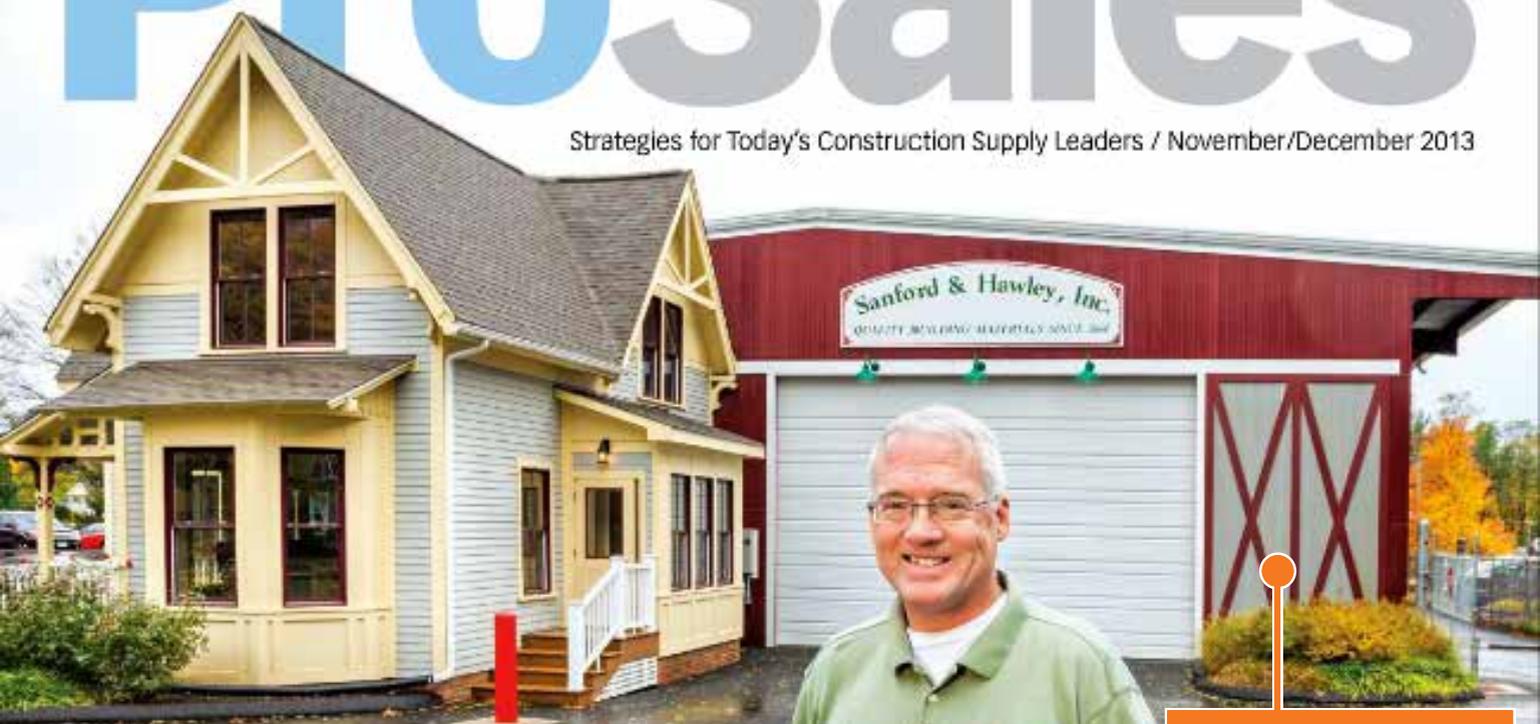


# ProSales

Strategies for Today's Construction Supply Leaders / November/December 2013



Building by  
CT Darnell / Sunbelt Rack

## 2013 Excellence Awards

Bob Sanford turned a  
daunting challenge into  
an opportunity for  
Sanford & Hawley



Cantilever rack by  
CT Darnell / Sunbelt Rack

# Historic Makeover



Most lumberyards would have just taken the money and moved if the state said it planned on taking all but about half an acre of the business' functional land—especially if the buildings were old, the layout inefficient, and the neighbors hostile.

But not Sanford & Hawley, a 129-year-old lumber and LBM operation in Unionville, Conn. The company, now operated by the fourth and fifth generations of its founder, stubbornly stuck to its historic roots and pulled out all the stops to stay where it started in 1884.

It took expert help, some powerful persuasive skills, a good deal of ingenuity, and extreme persistence—not to mention more costs—but in the end, Sanford & Hawley created a lumberyard

impressive enough to win the 2013 ProSales Excellence Award for Best Facility Design.

The company operators' goal was to create a new lumberyard that was convenient for customers, palatable to the neighbors, and efficiently designed. Other wants included enough storage for all of its inventory, a space for the company's offices, and accessible modern technology that preserved the site's historic fabric.

Accomplishing their goals was a tall order, considering the obstacles. In the end, it took moving a house, giving a standard metal building the look of a historical barn, building a warehouse without being able to add or subtract fill while working around a stream and a sewer line, hours of meetings and negotiations with

neighbors and town officials, and some complicated construction to connect buildings at obtuse angles.

## How It Began

The renovation started in about 2009 after the state announced plans to take a substantial part of the main lumberyard to renovate a bridge over Roaring Creek. The lumberyard was already cramped, operating on a meager 0.83 of an acre, and 20,000 square feet of that was taken up by a creek that bisects the site. After the state took what it needed for the bridge construction, there was just over half an acre of land left after discounting the brook in the middle—not enough for a functional lumberyard.

Sanford & Hawley could have

chosen to sell the state all of its land or keep the leftovers and sell it to developers who were eager to buy it.

“But having just celebrated the company’s 125th anniversary, the Sanford brothers [Bob, Ted, and Frank] would have no part of either,” wrote Bob Sanford in the company’s award submission. “Instead we turned to trusted advisers and others to strategize.”

## Overcoming Obstacles

A breakthrough came when engineers at Buck & Buck, out of Hartford, Conn., suggested finding a way to merge the remaining lumberyard land with two other parcels that Sanford & Hawley owned across the dead-end street that together equaled a little more than half an acre. The town agreed to abandon the street and re-deed the land back to Sanford & Hawley, which had donated it to the town in the late 1800s.

Contiguous land in place, neighborhood opposition was the next challenge.

Other than the lumberyard, the neighborhood is completely residential, a quaint enclave of historical homes, most built by one of the lumberyard’s founders, Frank Sanford, during the late 1800s. Before the renovation, neighbors had routinely called police to complain about trucks backing up to squeeze into the yard. They weren’t keen on the idea of the lumberyard staying, much less expanding. Town meetings on the expansion went on for hours at a time and continued to be held for months.

The Sanfords armed with a gaggle of experts—architects, engineers, traffic specialists, building appraisal professionals—began the difficult task of winning approval for the project. “I remember one public hearing that was hours on end. I estimate it was costing us more than \$1,000 an hour,” Bob Sanford recalls.

“Despite the angst and contro-

versy, over time some moderate neighbors came to realize that a new facility with proper landscaping and buffering would be an improvement to the current run-down, dated buildings,” Sanford says.

Reaching that point took months, and three plan iterations, before the project was approved.

## Complicated Concessions

After working through a number of issues with the township and neighbors, approval from the neighborhood hung on one final caveat residents required of Sanford & Hawley: They wanted a historic house owned by the lumberyard to be saved.

“That became the deal breaker,” Sanford says. “I didn’t see how it was possible.” But the company’s design team came up with a plan that required the house to be lifted off its foundation, rotated 90 degrees, and moved about 10 yards to where it would be re-installed on a new foundation right in front of the new lumberyard complex. “Oh my gosh, it was a lot of work,” Sanford says. “It sounds simple, but it was hardly so.”

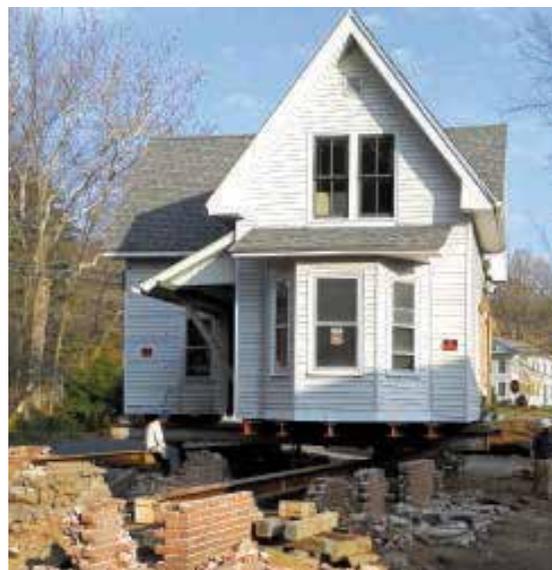
But, in the end, the house—now sitting just 4 inches from the warehouse—became a focal point for the lumberyard and home to the

company’s office, contractor sales center, an employee break room, as well as an emergency response center with generators to power the yard’s computers during a shutdown.

Moving the house was one of several complicated parts of the renovation, which was done in two phases starting in 2009 with the construction of a new warehouse and moving the house, and finishing in 2013 with the interior house renovation and emergency response center.

## From Warehouse to Barn

The first and most substantial phase, which started after the town approval in 2009, probably wouldn’t have been possible at all if





**Power Bin system by  
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it hadn't been in the middle of the recession when business was slow. The lumberyard had to be closed from early October 2009 until June 2010 while the new drive-through warehouse and storage building was built. Fortunately, Sanford & Hawley has three other facilities, which served its customers in the meantime.

The warehouse began as a standard metal-sided building, 54 feet wide and 195 feet long with two levels built by Sunbelt Structures, in Alpharetta, Ga. But it ended up looking more like a barn.

"It became pretty clear really early on that [a plain metal building] wasn't going to go far with the town," Sanford says. "The town takes a lot of pride in its history."

So the company's architect, Jack Kemper, of Kemper Associates Architects, in Farmington, Conn., came up with the idea of selling the warehouse as a barn and making it look like a historical barn on the street-facing ends. The design team took road trips to look at barns in the area, including the old Sanford family barn, to spark ideas about how it should look. "They really gave it a nice look," says Sanford of Kemper's work. "It was much more costly to

do, but [we have] no regrets."

Making the warehouse look like a barn was easy compared with building a foundation for the metal structure. A standard 6-inch slab, the typical foundation for such buildings, just wouldn't work on a site where a stream and a city sewer line lay beside the building.

On the west side of the site, the foundation required very deep, very complex walls that run below the level of the abutting sanitary sewer line. The township wanted to make sure that, if work had to be done on the sewer line, it wouldn't disturb the foundation of the barn warehouse in the future.

The construction of the foundation walls was further complicated because they needed to be poured during the bitterly cold winter of 2009 to 2010. That necessitated expensive additives to the concrete so that it would cure faster. Even then, the curing concrete wore blankets at night to keep the mixture from freezing.

In addition, the new warehouse couldn't be any closer to the brook than the existing buildings had been, and the grading underneath the new building couldn't be changed—no fill could be added or taken away.

Another complication for the

project involved connecting the new drive-through barn with an existing warehouse. Sanford & Hawley had to renovate rather than rebuild the existing warehouse on that side of the property because the foundation was built in the brook itself. Removing the warehouse and rebuilding it would have triggered a whole new set of requirements. So to make the two buildings meet, a portion of the old building had to be cut off to match up with the new drive-through barn. "It was quite a bit of work to fortify one foundation and put another one up to it," Sanford says.

### Brotherly Alignment

Despite the difficulty and extra costs of their lumberyard's overhaul, the Sanford brothers have no regrets, nor did they have any disagreements about whether to go on with the process—even during the difficult days.

"There is such a sense of history, heritage, and pride. It's our homestead. There were no second thoughts," Sanford says. —Teresa Burney is a freelancer who writes about the business of building, designing, marketing, and selling homes.