

By Patrick Lapinski

# MINER'S ACE HARDWARE HAS HELPED BUILD A 'STICKINESS' TO THE RETAIL SITE

**S**erving the needs of their customers is what keeps Super One Foods CEO Patrick Miner going every day. He continually strives to do better, and for the Miner's Inc. family line of grocery stores, to provide more for the communities they serve across the Northland. Holding true to that promise recently led to a venture into the retail hardware business. We asked

CEO Miner how it's been going, and is there possibly more to come?

A little more than five years ago the Miner family entered into a franchise agreement to open Miner's Ace Hardware at 1515 Oakes, alongside Superior's first Super One grocery store. Was it a bold move or an opportunity waiting to happen?

A little of both says Miner, a decision to move forward coming only af-

ter the company studied the market and spent several years educating themselves and working with Ace on aspects of their hardware business model. Miners did their due diligence in making sure this could be successful. Foremost among the thinking within the leadership circle was that a hardware store in that location in Superior met one of their core beliefs, helping an under-served market.







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- PATRICK MINER, CEO - SUPER ONE FOODS

"We were at the point where we wanted to remodel. We were coming up on maybe seven years since the previous remodel at our grocery store there and the marketplace had changed. We had reinvested on the other side of town, consolidated two stores and built the Harbor View grocery store," explained Miner. "We needed to again try to build some more strength and stickiness to the Oakes Avenue site and

thought it was a good model. We felt like that side of town really was underserved. You go south on Tower and hardware has a little more presence and while some of the players have been around a long time, their focus is maybe a little more on lumber, or different things"

The overall population of Superior has been rather static in recent decades, yet the retail food and grocery business has

expanded almost dramatically. "There is a lot of new competition; Walmart became the Walmart Supercenter, and then came Aldi's, and all the Kwik Trip's showed up in the market. You have to do a good job, not only focusing on what you do, but what else can you offer your customer," explains Miner. "Adding the convenience of a hardware store next to the grocery store fills another basket of goods with something they need.







That was why we made the move we did, going back over five years ago."

Miner says they started the hardware franchise at zero business. "It was a hardware desert, if you want to call it that. In that particular area there was no hardware business, and," says Miner proudly, "our results have been nothing short of incredible." He credits these results to the core team of eight employees who have brought the business to life.

"The success achieved to date for Miner's Ace Hardware is largely due to the team on the floor." Under the daily leadership of store manager Brian Frank, and assistant manager Dan Holmi, they take care of customers. Miner says building these relationships,

one customer at a time, builds trust and helps grow the business.

In our modern world, more often than not, a customer will bring a photo on their phone of their problem, or even a short video, and most all the time the staff at Miner's Ace are able to help figure out the best tool needed for the job. For all your home projects, from laying a tile floor to a simple handyman job like replacing a faucet, having the best products and name brands in the hardware industry make work easier. (Please follow all safety rules and use licensed contractors for home projects).

The product inventory at Miner's Ace Hardware includes all the name-brand

products you want on your tool shelf. Customers with all levels of skill can find quality tools from companies like Milwaukee, DeWalt, Diablos and Craftsman. Miner's Ace Hardware offers online ordering and curbside pick-up. This is a convenient option for customers who might be in the middle of a project and need to grab a quick tool or supplies for a job, or a customer who just likes the convenience of ordering online to get what they need quickly. Many items can be ready in as little as 15 minutes when ordered online and set for store pick up.

It's always painting season and Miner's Ace Hardware carries the nationally recognized Benjamin Moore line of paint, as well







as product from Clark+Kensington, and Magnolia Home by Joanna Gaines Paint Colors and others. The store also stocks all the supplies you'll need to get the job done, whether its rollers and brushes, tape and caulk, or patch and repair kits, you'll find everything you need in the expansive paint department.

Professional painters can find all the supplies and paints they need as well. Miner's Ace Hardware has a complete selection of primers, varnish and stain, waterproofing sealants, and paint in sizes from one pint to five gallons. Ace also carries Wagner paint sprayers and all the nozzles and attachments. Ace has your project covered



Assistant manager Dan Holmi.

with drop cloths, ladders and scaffolding; whatever you need to do the job you'll find it inside the Superior store.

Any store worth a cent has a well-stocked lawn and garden department. These days, customers want to go home with the products they came into the store to find. Miner's Ace Hardware tries hard to not send a customer home disappointed. Currently, the summer demand for lawn mowers is at its peak, but regardless of the season, Miner's Ace Hardware has the seasonal inventory on hand. One of the hardware store's "ace" in the sleeve is their access to Miner's Distribution Center, a massive 200,000-square foot warehouse facility in Duluth.

"We order ahead for large items, like snowblowers, zero turn lawnmowers, or outdoor grills and warehouse them in Duluth," says CEO Miner. They're only a phone call away from delivery to the store. It means that your product is going to be there when you're ready to buy.

Ace even has a team of experts who assemble products so you don't have to spend your day off sorting out nuts and bolts. To top it off, Miner's Ace Hardware will deliver your assembled product right to your door at no expense to you. It's really hard to top that kind of service.

"The Distribution Center helps house Ace products throughout the year. Depending on the season, that might include a large quantity of snow blowers or grills. This gives Miner's Ace the advantage because when a big snowstorm hits or yards

start turning green, our Ace location has the inventory to supply customers with what they need, ready, assembled and delivered quickly," notes CEO Miner. "Ace offers free assembly and delivery of items for brands like Arien's and Gravley Lawn Mowers and grills such as Weber, Traeger and Big Green Egg."

When it comes to maintaining and servicing your Ace product you won't need to wait a month. The services offered at Ace are an incredible asset for the community. They service mowers, blowers, cut keys, program key fobs and they have the ability to cut glass, acrylic sheet and repair screens. Ace also offers a variety of sharpening services, everything from auger and chainsaw blades, to garden tools and knives.

"We have some great things that we can do, such as screen replacement, which has just been huge. There aren't many options for that and people need not only screens repaired, because the cat's clawed them or different things happen," laughs Miner, "or they just flat out need new ones; we can make them right there in-house."



Manager Brian Frank.

When it comes to keeping that prized Stihl chainsaw running at optimum level, you can be assured the team at Miner's are Stihl qualified to do the job. "One thing that's unique with selling Stihl products is that our staff actually have to go to Stihl school. They go to Stihl University and get professionally certified to be able to service that equipment. We've got folks who know all that stuff from back to front and again, they can turn it around quickly because they're masters at it."

Providing that "helpful" service is the brand focus of Ace Hardware. When you walk into Miner's Ace Hardware, the store



associates model the "The Helpful Place" attitude. The team assists customers in finding what they came in for or helps them find a solution for a problem they have.

Miner says it has been easy meshing Ace's culture with the Miner's company culture. "At Miner's Inc., we stand behind our team mem-

bers and the products we offer. Ace Hardware has proven to do the same," says the fourth-generation representative of the Miner family business. "We know the products being sold are trusted and reputable. The Ace and Miner business models have had long-standing success, making the operations of both stores seamless."

It's a different business model than the grocery model, but Miner says they complement each other. "The results have been positive," says CEO Miner. "We've always had to focus on service. The business model's a little different, but we're merchants and it's our job to be able to take care of customers' needs."







Miner emphasizes the high-quality products they carry. For example, he sees similarities between Super One's perishable departments having the best USDA Choice, Black Angus beef, while Miner's Ace Hardware also carries name-brand products like Sthil and Toro or Weber.

"Ace does an outstanding job on the marketing side of things, being the 'helpful place' on the service side. At the end of the day, however, we need to follow through on that with our team, and I believe we do. The countless plugs that I get from random people who have been customers in our store, the unsolicited, good, positive customer experiences that come in, reinforces our confidence in the team that we've got there."

The trend of ordering ahead, online and picking up in-store has grown significantly and is a convenience that customers are able to take advantage of. For instance, when it's time to get that new Traeger grill, Miner's Ace Hardware has put a lot of effort into making sure you have everything you need for the grilling season. Remember, if it's not in the store and on the floor, it's just a call away from the Duluth distribution center. Order ahead and Ace will have it assembled and even deliver it right to your patio.

The customer's appetite for grilling accessories and supplies also serves as an example of the symbiotic relationship between the hardware store and the grocery store. "Having an Ace Hardware location has im-



Ace Hardware employee Mike Hixenbaugh.

pacted some of the products we carry in our grocery locations. For example, we've become more well-versed in the types of sauces and seasonings that are trending within the grilling and BBQ communities and have brought some of those flavors into our stores.





"We've got a lot of specialties, especially on the grilling side," adds Miner, ever the congenial salesman. "Everyone's not shy about firing up their grills in the summertime. We've got all the specialty spices. If you're putting something special on the dinner plate for friends or family, people aren't shy about buying the right seasoning

and doing the right preparation for those meals, too." They have a great inventory and supply on hand, and since Miner's Ace Hardware is connected to Super One, it's a short walk to the meat and deli department to fill up your summer grilling basket.

The hardware store and grocery store have complimented each other well. Groceries and household maintenance items are both necessities for homeowners. "A customer may be stopping in for milk and remember they needed a certain tool to fix a leaky sink. Or they could be planning a BBQ and pick up their groceries at Super One but head into Ace to pick up a cooler, or grilling accessories. We have found that cross promoting the two locations have complimented each other well."

It was this line of thinking that led to the birth of Miner's Market in 1940s-era Grand Rapids, Minnesota, where Tony and Ida Miner ran a small tavern along Highway 2. The origin story is well known, and always worthy of another read. The tavern suffered a loss of business every evening when the patrons would leave early so they could get to the grocery stores before they closed.



Tony saw a potential business opportunity, opening Miner's Market in 1943. It wasn't long before the tavern was pushed to the back of the building as the grocery side took off. Decades later, great-grandson Patrick Miner sees similar potential in the growth of the hardware business.

"I think we are still growing and building that customer confidence. Again, our staff have been in the store a long time and they wear it on their sleeve every day," concludes Miner. "I think we've built some incredible momentum. It's been good for the grocery store as well in helping build strength and confidence...call it stickiness to that that site." 📷

Patrick Lapinski is a freelance writer who grew up in Superior.



Mike Jacobsen helping an Ace Hardware customer with his purchase.