

WMIA 2012 Wooden Globe Winner: Northland Forest Products Inc.

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Sponsored by the [Woodworking Machinery Industry Association](#), this series features the winners of the 2012 Wooden Globe Awards. Here is Northland Forest Products Inc.'s story.

When home building and the entire U.S. economy started their slide several years ago, Northland Forest Products Inc. owner Dick Pyle used the past as a guide for the company's survival through the downturn.

He and wife Shari had started their company, buying and selling dimensional lumber to the upper Midwest home building industry in 1979 in the Twin Cities. "I lived through the big '79-'82 downturn," he says. Mortgage rates were up to 16 percent. Prime was at 19 percent and "housing starts were on the bottom."

Lessons learned then have served him well, though they are counter to the conventional wisdom of today. "Most people won't invest when times are slow," he says. "But I have a different vision. That is the time that you have to be innovative, make changes and try something different. I knew when we went into this recession, it was time for us to retool and reinvest."

In the past 30 months Northland Forest Products Inc. (NFPI) has invested \$1.4 million in new equipment to help produce the hardwood mouldings and dimensional lumber at its 60,000 square-foot plant in Shakopee, MN. The reasons, Pyle says, were because the large-volume orders his company thrived on were disappearing, and reinvesting in new equipment would enable him to compete for smaller orders and secure new customers.

Runs of 5,000 to 10,000 lineal feet of mouldings to supply retailers' inventory were no longer the norm, says Pyle. "People only wanted to buy enough material for a specific job. We knew we were going to have to do something to be more specialized ... to go after the small custom market."

But creating small runs with a quick turnaround, he adds, is "difficult, unless you're set up with the right equipment, software and procedures."

That is precisely what the company did. Among NFPI's investments in technology were: two Weinig Powermat 1000 HSK new-generation moulders; Weinig MillVision Pro 2.0 software that networks the entire moulding process; Raimann KM and KR Value Rip rip saw lines, the latter of which is paired with Ultimizer's Ulti-Vision color scanner; Timesavers 52-inch planer sanders; a Rondamat 960 grinder and Optical Control system for tooling, as well as a Flow Waterjet Pro for roughouts.