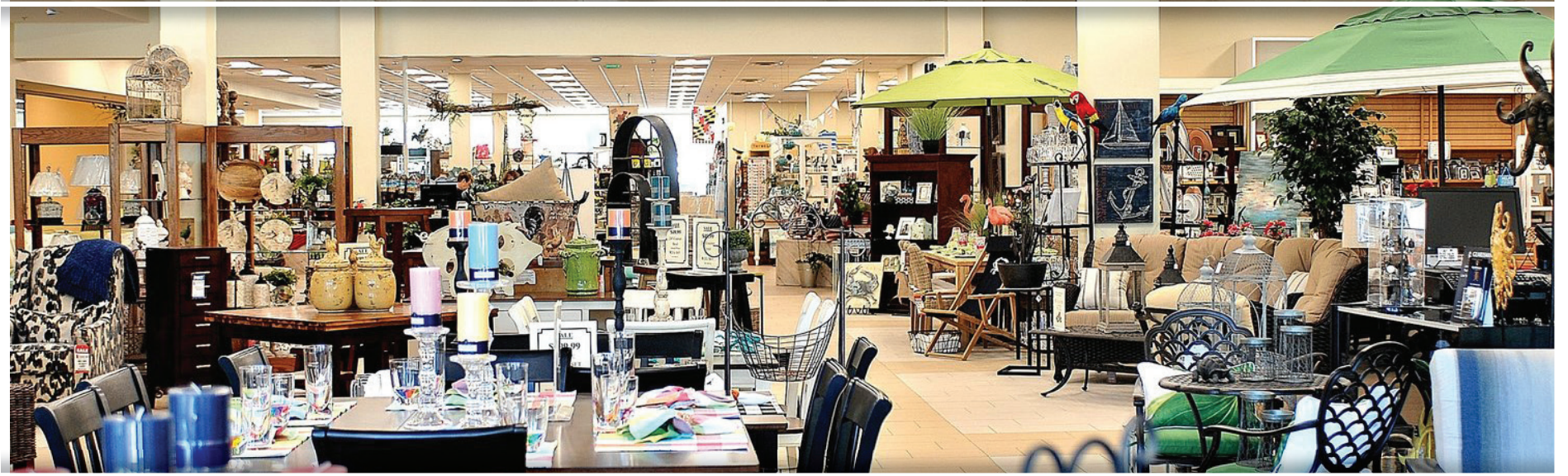


Stebbins Anderson CELEBRATE

150 YEAR ANNIVERSARY



150
YEARS

STEBBINS ANDERSON BUILDS 150 YEAR DYNASTY ON A FOUNDATION OF FAMILY VALUES

There are very few businesses that manage to eclipse the 15-year mark, particularly small, locally owned businesses. There are even fewer that have stood the test of time as well as Stebbins Anderson as it celebrates 150 years in business. Of course Stebbins is no ordinary store run by ordinary people. It's a mega store filled with patio furniture, hardware, novelty items, and good vibes courtesy of its knowledgeable staff and passionate owners.

After even a brief conversation with owners Ken and Bonnie Knight, it's apparent that something special is going on at Stebbins.

Stebbins Anderson opened in 1867 and called downtown Baltimore home until 1904 when the Great Baltimore Fire forced them to relocate to Towson. Although Ken and Bonnie didn't purchase the business from former owner and friend Richard "Dick" Powers until 2015, they've both been heavily involved in Stebbins' success for almost 35 years.

Ken started working for Stebbins in 1981 and was previously a minority owner until Dick passed away in 2013. Other than a brief hiatus between 1994 and 2001—when Ken ran a lumber business in Macon, Georgia—the Knights have called Stebbins home their home away from home, much to the delight of local customers who frequently stop by just to say hello.

"I was lured away by the good weather and a chance to play more golf," Ken joked.

From 1981 until 1988, Ken worked as a controller for Stebbins Anderson and its sister company SACO Supply located in Timonium, which contained the wholesale lumber side of the business.

"Once the light rail was constructed, the property became more valuable as retail space than it was for wholesale lumber," Ken recalled. "Dick had an opportunity to move that property, and at the same time I had the opportunity in Georgia. Even though I was there for 8 years, we remained friends. One day he gave me a call and said, 'I'd really like you to come back.' We worked out an equity agreement and I've been here ever since."

After Dick died, his children contacted Ken and asked if he was interested in taking full ownership of Stebbins. Over the years, the Knights had become great friends with Dick's children, and they knew there was no one better suited to take ownership of their father's store than Ken Knight.

The Stebbins Anderson of today bares almost no resemblance to the business that first opened in Baltimore in 1867.

But, it does have two things in common with the original store: quality products and a customer-first mentality. The early rendition of Stebbins Anderson focused strictly on wholesale coal, lumber, and bricks. Over time, they began gradually adding hardware to their list of products.

Although Stebbins had previously dabbled in retail, the business didn't start focusing on non-hardware related merchandise until 1977.

"Today the business is totally different than it was in 1867," Ken said. "In 1977, they opened the spot where we're currently located for their retail products. What they realized is that you can't have someone looking for a bird feeder and someone else looking for a box of studs in the same line. It doesn't work. The retail customer wants to talk about their needs, walk around, have friendly conversations with the staff, and the staff want to

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reciprocate. The contractor just wants to get in and get out. So, they had to separate the business.”

Not long after that transition, the business was sold to Mr. Powers and expanded to 40,000 square feet. While Ken was keeping his eye on Stebbins, he also helped his wife Bonnie open two female-oriented stores as well as a patio furniture store in Columbia that his son Kenny was operating. It’s safe to assume that Ken wasn’t spending much time on the links during this time period.

“We eventually pulled out of the Columbia location because I needed Kenny helping me here,” Ken stated.

While Bonnie ran the two other stores that sold a variety of fashion accessories and jewelry with names like Pandora and Vera Bradley, Ken and Kenny set their sights on ensuring Stebbins would stay relevant long enough to hit that 150-year milestone.

As Bonnie’s stores became more popular within the local community, her suppliers wanted more space. The two stores were eventually united and opened at The Shops at Kenilworth, which as you probably know is also the home of Stebbins Anderson.

But the term “adequate space” is not part of Ken and Bonnie’s vocabulary. Instead of accepting their current situation,



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they negotiated with the mall to end Bonnie’s lease and expand Stebbins so there was enough space for both stores. For the first time ever, the Knights were literally ALL under one roof.

“I’m very fortunate,” Ken said. “My wife is good, my son is good. The only bad thing was that I had to fire my two daughters,” he said with a grin as Bonnie laughed. “They didn’t want to work on Saturdays.”

“He didn’t fire them,” Bonnie chuckled. “They said they quit; I said I fired them,” Ken joked.

His two daughters currently work at the University of Maryland St. Joseph Medical Center and John Hopkins. So while



The father and son combo of Ken & Kenny Knight.

they concentrate on healing people, the rest of the family works to ensure Stebbins is never in need of resuscitation. “Now they’re customers expecting a discount,” Ken asserted as Bonnie chimed in with her contagious laugh.

Despite multiple owners and different visions, Stebbins has always been about family and community. “It’s always been run by families, it’s always been local, and it’s always been easy to deal with,” said Ken. “We work with local charities and schools. We’re well known in the community. I’m just fighting to keep us that way.”

Not only are Ken’s concerns valid, they’re something all of us should consider before we make our next purchase. Most people are looking for a good deal, not necessarily a good relationship with the people selling that product. As more online stores like Amazon infiltrate the market, the need for mom and pop stores continues to decline. Online purchasing is typically cheaper, there’s less overhead, and it doesn’t require you to change out of your pajamas. But for all its pros, there is one glaring con that threatens to convert even the most experienced online shopper into a born-again retailer: customer-service.

The scenario is probably all too familiar. You order something online, it’s defective, and you spend the next two days

trying to rectify it, only to receive the wrong replacement item. That’s why stores like Stebbins are invaluable to the American economy. You may pay more up front, but you save more in the long run. Ken and Bonnie know this. Truth is, most of us know this. We just ignore our conscience in order to save \$100.

Stebbins is the antithesis of online shopping drama, something that the Knights credit to their experienced staff and dedicated employees, some of whom have been working at Stebbins for over 30 years including Dough Frisch (17 years), VP of Marketing; Beth Bossle (29 years), Senior Buyer/Merchandising; Debbie Pickel (31 years), Controller; and son Kenny Knight (16 years), VP of Operations.

“When people buy something at Stebbins, they know they’re getting a good product,” said Ken. “It may cost a little more, but they don’t have to worry about it being wrong, or cheap. We stand behind our products. We don’t sell cheap grills and cheap furniture. But if something does happen, we’ll fix it. We’ll take care of it. We’re not going to sell anything to our customers that we wouldn’t buy ourselves.”

If you haven’t been inside Stebbins recently, what you discover may shock you. Boxes of nails and 2x4s have been



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replaced with novelty items and Weber grills. But that doesn't mean you have to go somewhere else to find a #6 screw. Stebbins still has a number of home improvement items available; you'll just find more items suitable for a homeowner rather than a home contractor.

"As much as our older customers hate to see us change anything, we have to change," Bonnie mused. "There's a Will Rogers quote that goes, 'Even if you're on the right track, you'll get run over if you just sit there.' We like to refer to that as our unofficial store motto. You have to keep changing with the times or there won't be anything left to change," she warned.

"It's a different kind of mall," Bonnie added. "It's a neighborhood mall. They show family movies on Friday nights in the parking lot and sell hamburgers, hot dogs, and cotton candy. It's a fun, free evening for people in the community."

As the Knights described the mall atmosphere, their eyes lit up as they told stories of Easter egg hunts, high school bands, after-prom parties, train gardens, and Santa Claus. But the most remarkable part of the conversation was how they referred to the mall as "their" mall. To them, it's not just a Greenberg Gibbons mall, it's everyone's mall. They take pride in what it was, what it is now, and what it's becoming.

One of the primary features that separates The Shops at Kenilworth from other malls is that it's filled with "local flavor." No Gap, no Penny's, no Macy's, no Sears. Although some national chains do exist at Kenilworth, the owners have consciously chosen a good mix of upscale national and local businesses in order to avoid the perception that their mall is just a place to "hang out."

The novelty of a store like Stebbins isn't lost on Ken and Bonnie. "The second I say that I work at Stebbins, people go crazy. They say, 'I love that store!' And I always tell them to come in and say hi. You don't find a lot of stores like us where you can find almost anything. This is more of an experience. We want our shoppers to have an experience when they come here. If they want to come talk to us about their day, that's absolutely fine with us! We like to be social here. You can't get that on the internet."

"We're constantly trying to figure out what it is that we can bring in the store that will keep people coming in, other than my smiling face," Ken smirked. "We look for niches. If you want a gift, you don't have to go to a mall and run around for hours. If you want a wedding gift, an anniversary gift, a holiday gift, you just come here and you get it done. It's just that easy."

Congratulations, Stebbins Anderson, on your outstanding achievement.
Here's to the next 150 years!

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When people visit the Knights at Stebbins, they want them to leave with positive vibes and remember the experience just as much as the products they purchased. “We don’t want this to be a drudgery of shopping,” Ken added. “We want folks to come in and look around, and say, ‘This is really neat. I couldn’t find this anywhere else.’ I want to be the family, friendly fun store. I want people to say, ‘We got this at your store and we couldn’t find it anywhere else.’”

But most importantly, the Knights want customers to keep coming back. And why wouldn’t they? After all, the difference between the typical retail store and Stebbins is Knight and Day.

Stebbins Anderson est. 1867

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