

The Maine Event

Kittery Trading Post Withstands the Tests of Time

By Meghan Beach



Labbe: We have great relationships with all of our vendor partners who provide us with the best products for our customers and we pay our bills on time. They love to showcase their products in our store because of this relationship and our year-round strong customer traffic.

And boy does Kittery Trading Post showcase products. Through its positive vendor relationships, Kittery Trading Post has been able to provide customers the wide selection of products they have come to expect. One step inside the 95,000-square foot store and your eye wanders past countless products that would satisfy every type of client, from the hard-core hiker/camper to the occasional outdoors person for every season. A diversified product line is a sure-fire way to survive the changing times.

NSGA: If you had to narrow it down, what has been the one leading reason for your success throughout the years?

Labbe: Our customers and staff. The customers love the brands we carry and the customer service our staff provides, in turn they have told all of their friends about us and have encouraged everyone to shop the Post when they visit Maine.

Customers have regularly provided outstanding reviews of Kittery Trading Post, commenting on how the customer service exceeds expectations with staff product knowledge, patience and the willingness to go the extra mile.

As a result of its customers' great shopping experience, Kittery Trading Post has truly become the go-to-place in Maine. Families have been going to Kittery Trading Post for generations. Customers remember going to the Post as children before big family trips heading up north in Maine and they speak excitedly about keeping the tradition alive with their own children. The result is a store that holds powerful nostalgic value that keeps customers coming back time and time again.

NSGA: How did you stay competitive and continue to be "the place to be" through-



Kittery Trading Post has grown from humble beginnings and since 1938 it has been a fixture for outdoors gear and supplies in southeastern Maine.

In 2013, Kittery Trading Post celebrated an impressive and rare 75th anniversary as a family-owned and operated business. The company began in 1938 with fewer than a handful of employees and a dream. Today, Kittery Trading Post employs 325 people in a whopping 135,000-square foot location in Kittery, Maine, in the far southeastern part of the state. And it is still growing.

NSGA NOW recently spoke with long-time NSGA member David Labbe – who is the

Senior Vice President of Finance & Administration and has been with Kittery Trading Post for 28 years – to find out just how Kittery Trading Post has been able to stay successful throughout the test of time.

NSGA: In your perspective, what has Kittery Trading Post done to stay successful as the Sporting Goods Industry and Outdoor Industry has changed over the years? How have you stood the test of time?



Kittery Trading Post has undergone more than 15 expansions to what is now a 135,000-square foot facility that employs 325 people.

out the digital age?

Labbe: We have kept our POS systems current so we can process large numbers of customers through the checkouts with very little wait time. We launched an Internet business in 2006 so our customers could shop us when they are not visiting Maine.

In addition to keeping up with the digital times, Kittery Trading Post has been able to evolve its store into a destination. As a result, even though customers can shop online they still prefer to come to the store for the experience of shopping at the Post. There are free seminars and clinics, food carts to eat while you shop, well-trained staff to help with every purchase, and carved wooden statues and taxidermy add to the outdoors ambience.

Furthermore, Kittery Trading Post has been able to use its location to its advan-

tage over the years. The store's location at the southeastern part of Maine is strategic since it is located at the "gateway" to the state's northern wilderness and is right off of the Maine Turnpike (Interstate 95) and U.S. Highway 1. Customers make it a point to stop by for last-minute gear and advice before heading out on an outdoors adventure. Kittery Trading Post was the sole retailer taking advantage of this strategic location until 1965. Since then, other business began to recognize Kittery as a strategic gateway point and, as a result, have turned the once sleepy town into an outlet shopping mecca. Now, Kittery Trading Post acts as a beacon in the sought-out shopping destination town.

NSGA: What are some lessons learned you can provide startup businesses?

Labbe: First, don't expand too fast. We are a very successful 76-year-old business which operates out of a single retail loca-

tion. Secondly, diversification of products, markets and customers are a real strength and will help you weather cyclical periods.

To say Kittery Trading Post simply operates out of one location is a humble understatement. Kittery Trading Post underwent more than 15 expansions of its retail floor space, parking lot, warehouse and inventory to offer the most comprehensive shopping experience for its customers. Because Kittery Trading Post focused all of its attention on making its one location unforgettable, it created a destination that travelers come to simply because of the experience and discovery that occurs while shopping.

NSGA: How have you been able to provide such an expansive, comprehensive and hands-on shopping experience for your customers?

Labbe: We have stayed firm to our core markets, added new markets when appropriate and have continuously reinvested back into the business by adding additional square footage, advance technology, more depth of inventory and, most importantly, have invested in our people who provide the best customer service in the Outdoor Industry.

It comes as no surprise that Kittery Trading Post has truly stood the test of time. After more than 75 years, Kittery Trading Post has become iconic in the Outdoors world. In our humble opinion, it is simply worth a trip to Maine to see it for yourself.

On behalf of NSGA, we hope to continue to celebrate Kittery Trading Post's success for many more years to come.



Kittery Senior Vice President of Finance and Administration David Labbe, left, with basketball Hall of Famer Bill Walton at the 2012 NSGA Management Conference and Team Dealer Summit. Labbe has been with Kittery for 28 years and has played an integral role in its growth.