

THE SWANSON GROUP – Producing Sustainable Products Before “Green” Was Fashionable

Glendale, Ore.—The Swanson Group, based here, has been manufacturing quality wood products since 1951. Established by brothers Dean and Rod Swanson and a few other investors, the firm typically serves both large retail yards and wholesale distribution centers.

According to Bob Maurer, Marketing Director, Swanson has been involved in sustainable practices since their early beginnings. “The Swanson’s have always supported good stewardship and sustainability. Those issues were just as important in the 50’s and 60’s as they are today they just didn’t have the exposure to consumer groups like they do today. Practicing sustainable forestry is the sort of thing you do because it’s the right thing to do, not because it’s the fashionable way.”

Maurer explained how the Swanson’s were one of the first companies to convert their mill to small log production which utilized smaller diameter second growth timber instead of the traditional old growth Doug Fir timber.

“The company made that conversion back in the 60’s and was well ahead of the curve in anticipating the restrictions that would soon develop in regards to old growth harvesting.” Maurer added “we’ve been at this for more than 59 years and we like to remind our customers and buyers that this is something that is an integral part of our culture. When you live and work among these great forests you take your responsibility for sustainability pretty serious.”

The state of Oregon passed into law the Oregon Forest Practices Act in 1972 some 20 years before today’s popular certification programs were formed. “In many ways the OGPA was our certification agency – with two major differences – first they didn’t intend to profit from establishing and following good forest practices and second – they made compliance the law.” Recently Swanson Group became certified under the SFI (Sustainable Forestry Initiative) program for fiber sourcing. “We chose SFI, not for their consumer marketing voice, but for their best forest practices”, added Maurer.

Concern for the environment doesn’t start and end at the woods though and Swanson Group recently extended their sustainable efforts to renewable energy when they signed up with Pacific Power, their utility provider, and their Blue Sky program. “Under the Blue Sky program we purchase over 1,500 100 kilowatt-hour blocks per month of renewable energy, with the result that over the course of a year Swanson Group avoids putting 1,108 tons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. The program increases our energy cost some 2-3% per month but we like to think that we are doing the right thing for the environment and view this as a long term commitment to future generations.”

Swanson Group operates five mills in Oregon; a dimension mill in Noti, a stud mill in Roseburg, and two plywood/veneer mills in Glendale and Springfield. “With our location

in southern Oregon we naturally have a freight advantage to California and that is our largest single market” says Maurer. “Shipping by truck to the central valley and Bay area of California has been a big advantage for our customers in controlling their inventory and managing their investment dollars. In southern California we maintain a large distribution inventory in Colton, Calif. and are able to serve that market with next day trucking of highly mixed loads to achieve the same inventory efficiency for our customers.”

“All of our mills are either serviced directly by the Union Pacific Railroad or by CORP (Central Oregon and Pacific Railroad) a small feeder line that serves the UP. We also utilize other shipping points in the Eugene area that give us added flexibility in carriers when we ship product back east.”

Swanson Group Sales Co. is the selling arm of Swanson Group and the dozen sales people on staff average close to 25 years experience in the business. They pride themselves on their level of service to their customers and their knowledge of the business and the ever changing markets. Swanson Group Sales Co. is led by John Stembridge Vice President of Sales and Distribution. Other senior management members at Swanson Group include: Steve Swanson President and CEO, Chuck Wert Executive Vice President, Robert Landau Vice President of Operations, Don Hardwick Vice President of Resources, and Rick Bernheisel CFO.

As Marketing Director, Bob Maurer works primarily with the sales team but interacts with all departments in promoting the company and the activities they undertake. “Going green has been a hot topic for many years now and it’s something we’ve always done as a matter of principle and daily practice; but we’ve never blown our own horn or made it an issue. As a major employer in several small towns where our mills are located and living in one of the most proficient tree growing regions of the world and dependent on those trees as raw material just makes one sensitive to proper care and stewardship with the timberlands. We want our employees, our communities, and our company to thrive for many years.”