

## Persistence pays off

### Necessity leads to better post protection

Ken McDonald always thought of himself as a car guy.

Growing up in northeast New Jersey, Ken McDonald was a car guy. In fact, he was such an auto enthusiast that he started up his own company to fix up cars after graduating from William Patterson College, where he majored in business and economics.

"I modified European cars," McDonald says. "Folks would bring me their nice cars, and I'd make them look and run better."

He did that for seven years, until he and his partner were bought out. That opened the door for a whole new opportunity.

McDonald's wife was from Pottsville, Pa., a small town in the state's anthracite region and a whole different culture from what McDonald calls the "urbanity" of North Jersey. The couple wanted to leave the New York City suburbs to raise their children in a small town.

"I had an opportunity to project manage single-home subdivisions in Pennsylvania," he says. While working at that job, another local company that specialized in post-frame construction tried to convince him to join them as a sales manager.

"After two years of persuasion, I finally did," McDonald explains. "I always thought pole buildings were neat, as far as their speed of build, flexibility and bang for the buck."

Six months into being in the pole-building business, in conjunction with his previous home-building experience, it struck him as odd that consumers were questioning the longevity of buildings. "Particularly the longevity of the post, which is the nucleus of the building," he says.

McDonald came to the conclusion that the weak link of the pole-building construction was the post in the ground, and something more than a chemical treatment was needed to ensure post life.

Rather than sit around and wait for someone to come up with a better solu-

tion for post longevity, McDonald decided to take care of it himself.

"That's how Post Protector was born," he states.

He went to his employers who were enthusiastic about the idea, so McDonald began to look into how he could develop his idea. He eventually met up with the Geo Synthetics Institute at Drexel University in Philadelphia. McDonald explained the post-frame building process to the scientists and they recommended a special high-density polyethylene, which is the same treatment used on landfill liners.

"That was the piece of the puzzle I needed," McDonald says. "I needed the proper material. Then I went through a tooling process, made the molds to make the parts and got involved with the National Frame Builders Association."

He introduced his product at a NFBA show 10 years ago. McDonald remained sales manager with his former company until five years ago, when he made his Post Protector company his full-time career.

Post Protector is a one-man company, with manufacturing and shipping done from southern Ohio. The idea behind the product, McDonald says, is thinking about treated wood in the ground.

"You cannot pin a performance mark on each and every post that you put in the ground," he explains. "There are many variables that come into play over the life of the post. My method is a 'belt and suspenders' mentality, with the post protected with a coating that has a lifespan of 449 years."

Another way to look at it, he says, is to think of the post being cocooned in a material with centuries of geo-application life and in a couple of hundred years, the wood will be in the same shape as it was on the day it was put into the ground.

"Today, there are \$2 million pole buildings being erected," McDonald says. "Companies are putting a lot of money and time into the highest quality prod-



ucts into these buildings. Arguably, the post is the most important piece to the building and that needs to be the highest quality as well.”

Post Protector, he says, simply slides over the post and construction goes on as continues.

“Many people don’t understand what goes on with decay,” McDonald explains. “A lot of folks believe moisture is the cause of decay. That’s one of the three conditions needed. The other two are oxygen and a temperature range from minus-40 to 100 degrees. Moisture comes when the wood fiber is at its saturation point. When those conditions exist, micro-organisms in soil colonize on the wood post using the wood fiber as a food source. Post Protector is a barrier system that doesn’t allow the micro-organisms to find the wood post.”

Post Protector gives McDonald the opportunity to make a unique contribution to the post-frame industry he loves. “The simplicity of the buildings intrigues me,” he says. “I believe post-frame is going to grow as more people discover the characteristics of the buildings.”

He adds that another thing he likes about the industry is the honest, hard-working people who work in it. “It is a pleasure to have settled within this industry,” he says.

He believes the biggest challenge is better exposure of the industry. “I believe the NFBA is on the right track with the Post-Frame Marketing Initiative. Post-frame should definitely enjoy a bigger piece of the market share, and I think Post Protector is one of the products that can help the industry grow.”

One of the downsides of his particular business is that McDonald isn’t usually directly involved with particular buildings, but he does have some experiences where Post Protector has made a difference.

“There was a project recently in Talbot County, Maryland, by Delmarva Pole Building Supply,” he explains. The project was more than \$2 million and was an agricultural government agency building. The owners didn’t want anything to do with post-frame construction, but Delmarva showed them the Post Protector literature.” It helped swing the decision.

“The concern for post longevity is out

there,” McDonald says. But he believes that this product developed by a New Jersey boy living in rural Pennsylvania

may help change that attitude and bring post-frame building to the forefront of construction. ■

