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The Interview: Harley and Aaron Magden, Window Nation

September 04, 2011 | By Jamie Smith Hopkins, The Baltimore Sun

Harley and Aaron Magden grew up working in the family business — supplying replacement windows to homeowners — but decided to make a change when their father sold the Ohio company.

The brothers are still selling windows. But now they're doing it from Glen Burnie.

Five years after founding Window Nation in the Baltimore area, the brothers have built the company into the 28th-largest firm on trade magazine Qualified Remodeler's list of the top 500 home-improvement companies nationwide. Revenue rose 70 percent last year over the year before.



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Not counting part-time installers, the company employs 26 in the area and just as many elsewhere — including Ohio. Window Nation entered the Cleveland market when the brothers' noncompete clause with father Mke Magden's former business, Regency Window Co., expired in 2008.

Harley, 35, and Aaron, 31, are married; each has a young daughter. They say they've settled into the Baltimore area and have no plans to move back to Cleveland.

The brothers talked with The Baltimore Sun recently about Window Nation's rapid growth, why they came to the Baltimore region — and which football team they root for when the Ravens go up against the Cleveland Browns.

How did you increase the company's revenue 70 percent last year?

Harley: A lot of things going our way. One of them was the [federal] tax credit [of up to \$1,500 for energy-efficiency projects], which recently expired. No. 2, we increased our advertising budget significantly to try to penetrate the market. We're relatively new in this area, so we're just trying to increase brand recognition.

Aaron: We took a lot of the market share. We offer a lot of different windows for different budgets. We're sort of like GM. We offer a Chevy, we offer a Buick, we offer a Cadillac.

How has the rough economy and difficult housing market affected your industry?

Aaron: Most people aren't thinking about buying new houses. They're staying in their existing house. Out of all the home-improvement projects that can be done, windows are something that will pay you back. They'll save people on their energy. That's been a big hit for us because it's not like a kitchen, where it's just beautifying the

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home. There's a lot of wants, but this is a need.

How's business this year?

Harley: We're tracking up around 20 percent this year. Which all things considered is very strong, considering, on average, trade publications ... say the markets are down 5 to 8 percent.

Why did you decide to leave your father's company after he sold it?

Harley: We stayed on for a little while — so did he — and basically ended up leaving the company to move on to bigger and better things.

We figured we had been in this business for a while, we knew it and we wanted to open a new company. ... We did have a noncompete [agreement initially] so we could not just open up in the city we lived in. So we checked out about 10 different cities and ended up here in Baltimore.

The housing stock is of the right age, the economy is very strong and stable because of all the government work and government employees, and it's just so conducive to expanding. ... Philadelphia is close, Charlotte is close. ... Plus my brother and I really like the area.

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Aaron: When we were younger, my dad used to take us to the Harbor every few years, and he'd take us to Ocean City.

How's the competition with the ex-family business going?

Aaron: In the beginning we were fighting tooth and nail. ... We're probably larger than they are now.

They're taking a corporate strategy into a family-owned ... business, which is slowly but surely deteriorating them.

What does your father think of your company and the fact that you're competing with his former business?

Aaron: He's very proud of us and what we've put together. Obviously we've learned a lot through him and through our family. It's really not that big of a deal that we're competing against his old company, because once we left, a lot of the employees that we hired had left. ... My dad doesn't have that attachment that he would have if my brother Harley and I stayed on.

Mike Magden was known for doing wild television commercials — yelling, "I'm gonna save you a lotta money!" What are your ads like?

Harley: Totally different. ... We don't do the eye-catching, loud commercials like my father did. We definitely take things down a notch. My brother and I have appeared on a few ads on radio and TV, but that's not really our forte. We like to stay on the low-key side of things.

What's the competition like in this region?

Harley: It's very fragmented. ... There's really a lot of room for growth.

Do you make your own windows?

Harley: We don't make our own windows, but we have an agreement where one of the local manufacturers makes the windows ... designed specifically for us. And [the windows are] also designed for [the climate in] this market.

How old were you when you got into the family business?

Harley: I started when I was 16, so about 19 years ago.

Aaron: Probably about 15 or 14. I was unloading the window trucks when they came in.

Was there a part of you that wanted to try something besides windows when you left?

Harley: We took time off and really thought about what direction to go in. ... Windows [were] the only thing that would force us to move; anything else, we could have stayed [in Ohio] if we wanted to. So it wasn't an easy decision.

Why did you do it?

Aaron: We just figured we knew this industry best. ... Our whole plan was to open up here and then have Cleveland as well, which we did. We were possibly going to move back, but now that our parents live in Florida, Baltimore's our home. We have no plans of leaving.

Harley: We're still Browns fans, though.

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