

## ONE ON *One*

With Roelif Loveland, President, Maze Nails

# Maze Nails driven for over a century

**M**AZE NAILS has managed to remain afloat as a successful nail manufacturing company while staying true to its promise of high-quality products for over 100 years.

BPD publisher Patrick Adams toured its 93-year-old factory in Peru, Ill., with Maze president Roelif Loveland. As the two strolled through the 1922 building, Loveland touched on the history of Maze as well as the importance of quality over quantity, a strong work ethic, and how customer loyalty is crucial.

Maze brothers secured a cut nail machine in 1886 and started making pure zinc nails. As the zinc nails began to take off, word spread about their new venture and soon other dealers arrived, insisting that the brothers make the nails available to them too, thus turning their lumberyard into a nail enterprise. In 1922, the brothers were making so many nails, they moved into the factory where the company still resides today.

*“Maze Nails has always been a company filled with extremely capable people—in the factory, in the office and out on the road. They know what needs to be done—and they do it,”* said Loveland, when asked if he ever felt the weight of running the business, being as old as it is.

*“We’ve been hiring new talent to the company—including several sixth generation Maze family members—and they are meshing nicely with us ‘old-timers.’*

*“It’s always been our mission to keep providing quality made-in-the-USA nails—dependable, well-made nails that will do the job.”*

Maze Nails has made a presence as one of the country’s leading nail providers, through the good and the hard times. By World War I, the company set its sights on the goal of creating an economical steel core nail, which provided dependable corrosion resistance and drivability.

The company also managed to keep itself afloat through WWII, when the country was experiencing a metal shortage.

*“Our buyers back then had to scrounge high and low for both steel wire and the zinc to galvanize the finished nails. We’ve purchased top-quality steel from Keystone Steel and Wire for many decades—so I’m sure that being a loyal customer of theirs back then paid off during times of shortage,”* Loveland explained.

The Maze men continued to push the company forward as a nail manufacturer, experimenting with electroplating, tumbler, and hot-galvanizing nails, and built a unique, fully-automated zinc coating system trademarked at Stormguard.

Today, over a century later, Maze manufactures nails for worldwide distribution. The Maze Lumber yard is still in business and is the oldest lumber dealer in the state of Illinois. The company has not only made a name for itself as a leading nail manufacturer, but also a loyal employer—and what makes them stay?

*“A lot of our employees arrived here well before I started. We are a small but mighty company where every person makes a significant difference. Our people know that and it really brings out the best in them.*

*One of the things we love to do is we put customer compliments on display, and amazingly we get a lot of them. I think that’s huge in getting these guys to realize how important quality is. Also taking people through our mill, and giving them a chance to explain what they’re doing is really important to them. The feedback we get drives them to realize our business*



Roelif Loveland

It may surprise some people to know that Maze Nails was not always just a nail company. In 1848, founder Samuel Nesbitt Maze started a lumberyard along the edge of the Illinois River. Unsatisfied with the staining and streaking caused by the cedar shingle nails they had to sell, the



**SINCE 1922:** BPD publisher Patrick Adams toured Maze Nails' factory in Peru, Ill., with president Roelif Loveland, the original windows still in tact. The building, which currently still resides at the original 1922 location, still serves as Maze headquarters today. Plans are in the works for a refurbishment for the 93-year-old facility.

*is important."*

Like most businesses, the market downturn in 2008 affected Maze, and the company had to take measures to weather the storm.

*"We ran into some scary times. We made some fairly significant changes in our staffing during the downturn—and got lean (but not mean). I also steadfastly believe that there is no other nail maker with the same extreme, high level of customer service," Loveland said.*

*"It's all a scary time. Business has never been so difficult. There's been some anti-dumping against the Chinese. Our problem with that, while it sounds good and we generally support it, is the price of the Chinese nails is so low that even if they place 100% tariff on the Chinese nails, it doesn't make any difference in our business.*

*"Times have definitely changed, but we just keep moving forward, produce the highest quality products we can, and stay close to our customers. Our products continue to be a huge factor in setting us apart from the rest of the industry—both the quality of the products and the sheer variety that Maze can offer to a lumberyard."*

Despite the amount of competition in the industry, the company has been able to stay well connected with the marketplace and the needs of their customers.

Nails are a product that appears so simple, but with over 2,800 SKUs, the company is far from simplistic. Every

single one is unique for a specific application, and Maze has a unique story in that it's one of the last nail companies standing in America.

*"We always like to keep our employees happy and excited. We want them to know how unusual it is that they're an American nail maker and we're still in business," said Loveland when asked how he makes this work.*

*From the outside, it may look like we are competing with China but we really aren't. They are the low end. We strive for the high-end business and there are people who want the high-end product.*

*If there are 20 people buying nails at Home Depot, I might get one of them, maybe not any that day. But the ones who are going to get the good quality nails will pay good money for them and I can spread good money amongst our people.*

*We can't compete with the Chinese and that's really what drove a lot of the other nail companies out of business. They were trying to compete with the Chinese, and they would continue to lower their value, the product quality suffered immensely, and their margins were horrible. It's almost a matter of putting blinders on. You've got to play your own game."*

Looking forward, Loveland is focusing on the quality of their product, making sure his customers as well as his staff are well educated and up to date with the latest industry news.

*"We're constantly working with the*

*market to find the next need so we can stay ahead from a product perspective. I believe that the construction industry will continue to use nails in both hand drive and pneumatic format for decades to come, so there's plenty of opportunity for a quality, domestic nail maker like Maze."*

Educating the marketplace is also extremely vital to the business.

*"That's a big issue now because a lot of the labor is foreign, some don't speak English, and the bridge of communication is not as sturdy," explained Loveland.*

*"So if you have a situation where they're getting hired to do a big siding job for a complex, he's looking for the lowest priced siding, the lowest priced nails. He's getting paid by the square, so he's going for the lowest cost, and*



because of the communication barrier, it makes it more difficult.

“Our mission is to get to consumers, using our website as a tool that we’ve been constantly updating. Any way that we can try to get to that eventual consumer is really good. Unfortunately that’s the expensive route.”

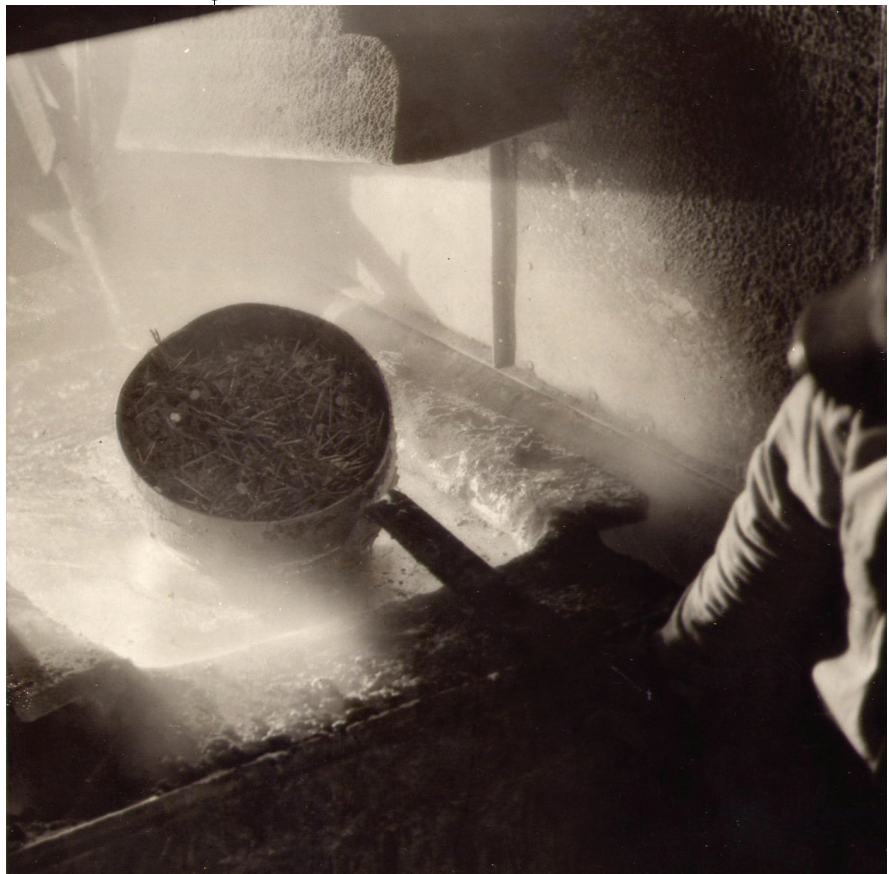
As times have changed over the last decade, Loveland is working to make sure Maze is keeping up with the evolving industry, staying well connected with retailers and distributors.

“The main benefit of being on the phones all day and at dozens of trade shows is that Maze Nails is very well-connected—and is regularly contacted by makers of building products that require new and unique fasteners. We’re asked to design the most effective nails for their new materials—and that gets us a jump on the market. We’ve got about 45 outside sales reps throughout the U.S. They are in retailers every single day, telling our story.”

As president and fifth generation to founder Samuel Nesbitt Maze, Loveland was destined to be a part of the business, but didn’t necessarily expect to be growing up.

“I got out of college with a degree in geology and there was a lot of opportunity in Texas. As I was putting out resumes that way, our advertising manager quit.

“I was lucky to have a dad who never put pressure on me. So when a job became available, I gave it a shot,” explained Loveland, tears welling up in his eyes.



**OVER 100 YEARS** ago, the Maze brothers were tired of the staining and streaking caused by the nails they had to use, driving them to invest in a cut nail machine, the start of Maze Nails.

“There are forks in life, and I happened to pick the right fork. It’s been an absolute pleasure. As we get older, we realize what’s important in life.”

When asked if he could offer one piece of wisdom to the industry, Loveland replied:

“Keep your eye on the ball with what it is your customers need. Even if they don’t appreciate the quality at the time that they’re paying for it, they’ll

appreciate it 50 years from now when their siding looks beautiful, and their next-door neighbors have stains and streaks, wondering what happened.

“In a lot of ways, we protect people because they don’t know. We can’t know everything that goes on around us. We need manufacturers that can protect us. When you climb in your car, you trust that someone did a good job manufacturing that airbag, don’t you?”



**PURE ZINC:** When Maze started making pure zinc nails, it caught the attention of other dealers and word began to spread. The nails were favored primarily due to their strong protection and durability.