

Rose & Walker sold, but workers to stay on

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In 1966, Dave Rose started a drywall mega-power in his Bloomington basement.

He was just another working-class neighbor, a curious 21-year-old living on South Washington Street blessed with helpful friends and a business partner-to-be in John J. Walker. All they meant to do with drywall was hang it, then finish it.

The simple business model took root within Rose's home, then grew into a house at 2527 S. Rogers St. soon after.

Merely 49 years later — and with the construction of a 10,000-square-foot warehouse at 300 W. Country Club Drive — Rose & Walker Drywall and Insulation has come a long way, and it's going through some additional changes right now.

On Wednesday, when the bulk of Monroe County was readying the bubbly and cardboard hats for New Year's Eve, Rose effectively finalized the sale of his lifelong company's supply division. What started as a home business project now belongs to Home Acres Building Supply, a regional chain with 26 stores across Indiana, Michigan and Wisconsin.

The contracting department's future is still in negotiations, Rose said, but all the employees — the newest one having spent 12 years with the company, Rose says — will stick around with Home Acres.

"I've done everything I could do," said Rose, who turns 70 next week. "I don't work anymore, and the employees need to finish out the rest of their careers here. ...They gave me their whole life."

Home Acres first tapped Rose on the shoulder in September to make him an offer. He talked it over with current business partner Warren Smith, 61, who was considering retirement, anyway. It took a month or two to decide, but they had a general goal: Find a way to make it happen smoothly for the rest of the company, and the timing would be right.

On Friday morning, Rose sat in a dusty office chair in the company's upstairs office. It would be his



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Dave Rose, the longtime co-owner of Rose and Walker Drywall and Insulation, poses Friday at the business on Country Club Drive. Chris Howell | Herald-Times

final day at work. He stretched his legs out, rested his folded hands on faded blue jeans and recalled the company's finer moments with Smith.

Downstairs, the company displayed a subtle, modest paper sign through its glass front door:
Closed until Monday. Inventory.

In the 1970s, Rose & Walker's crew grew from a staff of 10 friends into a workplace of 25 professionals. Adopting a pace of one semi-truck of insulation per week, they quickly became Bloomington's largest insulation contractor.

"The salesman came down here and said, 'You don't do that,'" Rose said. "You just don't sell it that quickly."

But he did.

And for good reason: Indianapolis-based L.C. Cassidy & Sons was the closest supplier Bloomington really had before companies such as Menards and Home Depot emerged at the national level. Rose & Walker's can-do attitude thrived across Monroe County because of its local reputation.

Rose even contracted friends who followed their standard 9-to-5 jobs by doing evening work in a specialized insulation truck — often staying on the clock as late as 10 or 11 p.m.

"That's just a large part of it, a neighborly environment," said Smith, a former employee of Cassidy & Sons. "Builders knew Dave. They didn't know who L.C. Cassidy was. He was down in Florida or the Bahamas somewhere. I even worked for him. But builders knew Dave, the guy from down the street."

The 2007-08 housing market crash proved testing for Rose & Walker, a time in which Smith said the company had to re-invent itself.

But if there's anything they kept in mind, it was a commitment to people — something they hope Home Acres will keep in mind as they guide Rose & Walker's former supply division through 2015 and beyond.

"All those years ago, people came to me and said: 'You know, I don't have a lot.'" Smith said. "But you help me, and I'll help you.' It wasn't even on a handshake. It was on those words. And that's stuck with me all these years."