

ROCKING R

ACE HARDWARE

A Division of Rockingham Cooperative

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Rocking R Ace Hardware Honored For Being 'Cool'

Receives Award From Parent Organization

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By VIC BRADSHAW

HARRISONBURG — Take a traditional hardware store, toss in Ladies Night and other special events, add features such as locally sourced seeds and what do you get? In the world of Ace Hardware stores, you get cool, Rocking R-style. Rocking R Ace Hardware of Harrisonburg was honored Tuesday by its parent organization with one of its four “Coolest Hardware Store” awards. Its selection was announced at the company’s annual Platinum Conference held in Las Vegas.



Rocking R employee Robert Mishler (right) divides up a salmon filet that he grilled as manager Bill Freeman finishes up a few marinated pork samples Saturday at the store's Grillin' & Chillin' For Father's Day sales event.



Rocking R Ace Hardware's customers speak highly of the store. "What makes them cool is the personnel," said "Chop" Hill of Mount Crawford. (Photos by Holly Marcus / Special to the DN-R)

The South High Street store — along with locations in Savannah, Ga.; Webb City, Mo.; and San Luis Obispo, Calif. — were selected for the award from more than 4,800 locally owned and operated Ace stores worldwide. It's the fifth year the company has recognized its “cool” stores. “I've been wanting us to win this award since they've had it,” store manager Bill Freeman said late Friday morning as customers bustled around the store. “So, I guess you could say that finally, finally we were recognized by the Ace Hardware family that we were cool.”

Freeman said he didn't know Rocking R had won the award until it was announced Tuesday. Division manager Brian Osborne nominated the store for the honor. However, Freeman wasn't particularly shocked that the store won. Nor was one longtime employee. “When we won, it wasn't like it was a surprise or anything,” said Rockingham County resident Chuck Allen, 52, who's worked in customer service at the store for 20 years. “This has always been my favorite store even before I started here.”

Birth Of The Cool

Rocking R was founded in 1935 as part of Rockingham Milling Co., with its current name established in 1966. It's now affiliated with Rockingham Cooperative, which bought Rockingham Milling in 2010. A key reason Rocking R caught the attention of Ace judges was the special events the store holds, Freeman said. Throughout the year, it holds Ladies Night, tool shows, bird seminars and adopt-a-pet days in conjunction with the Rockingham/Harrisonburg SPCA. Saturday's event was Grillin' & Chillin' for Father's Day.

The store, he added, also offers an expanded tool department aimed at meeting the varying needs of local clients, a large backyard bird center, and the popular local Wetsel seed brand. He was busy Friday planning to switch a seasonal display section from garden and patio items to canning supplies. Matt, Angela, Reece and Katarina Coleman of Mount Solon were among the customers at Rocking R. They stopped for garden supplies and bird feed, including pouring bags from the bulk seed bins. “We came here a couple of months ago and got bird feeders,” Matt Coleman said. “We've got about a hundred birds coming now.” Katarina, 12, said many of the family's new feathered friends are finches because those are the types of feeders they bought. “I do think it's cool,” Matt Coleman said of the store. “They have a little bit of everything.”

Service was another big factor in Rocking R's favor, Freeman said. His employees try to get to know their customers and care about them. “The small stores like this, we want to beat that big-box store,” he said. “If we're competing against the big-box stores, we've got to do it with service. It's all about convenience. We're a convenience hardware store.”

“Chop” Hill of Mount Crawford attested to the store's commitment to service. He said he's been shopping at Rocking R for “30 years probably,” stopping in at least monthly but sometimes as often as twice a week. “What makes them cool is the personnel,” he said. “If you want good, personal service, you've got to come here.”