

# STAUFFERS OF KISSEL HILL

A determined team charts a course to turn good ideas into concrete results

In business, there's usually no shortage of good ideas. What's typically lacking is the wherewithal to put these concepts into practice. Stauffers of Kissel Hill (SKH), a family-owned chain of garden centers and supermarkets in Pennsylvania, uses a team approach to plot a course that keeps the business moving ahead.

What makes SKH noteworthy, though, is its determination to maintain forward momentum despite obstacles. Two recent projects—SKH's Recession Action Plan and the redevelopment of its Rohrerstown location—show how this 78-year-old business keeps pushing aside roadblocks. Fierce determination and business savvy helped the team at Stauffers of Kissel Hill earn a Garden Center Innovator Award.

**RECESSION ACTION PLAN.** The economy was top-of-mind for SKH going into 2009. The company created a Recession Action Plan to guide business for the year. Like most companies, they implemented cost-cutting measures and wage freezes across the board. What they didn't skimp on, however, was marketing. In that realm, it was full speed ahead.

Jere Stauffer and Steve Gallion, chief operating officers of the company's garden center division, kept thinking of something Gallion and Debi Drescher, SKH marketing manager, had heard at ANLA Management Clinic: The consumer is in a state of "aggressive indecision."

"Consumers don't know whether to spend money or what," Gallion said. "You have to do something to

move them to a buying decision. What we chose to do was a pretty aggressive coupon campaign and tried to move people into making that buying decision."

SKH sent direct-mail postcards to more than 300,000 homes, which included a coupon for \$10 off merchandise with a minimum \$25 purchase. Amazingly, the company saw an almost 10 percent redemption rate on the coupon.

"We basically said to the customer, here's \$10 just for coming in," Stauffer said. "Our average sale [with coupon] was just shy of \$60."

According to Stauffer, you could say SKH was almost hyper-aggressive in its marketing efforts. But he just-





fies the strategy by recalling something he learned from his father...

"I remember him saying years ago that you have to approach marketing like the locomotive on a long freight train," Stauffer said. "You can get that train up and rolling, then whip the locomotive off the front. And that train is going to roll for a while, but

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sooner or later it's going to roll to a stop. And you're going to have to put all your energy into getting that train back up to speed. So why not keep the locomotive in the lead and keep that momentum going? That's marketing."

By all accounts, this advice has paid off.

"We're waiting on the final numbers," Stauffer said. "But we have every indication right now that we've had a very dramatic recovery. The moves that we made were the right direction to go."

**RENOVATION REALITIES.** In the midst of the recession, Stauffers of Kissel Hill was undergoing major redevelopment at its Rohrerstown, Pa., location. The company built a new 78,000-square-foot supermarket on the site and remodeled the garden center. The redesign of the outside plant yard and loading areas was completed in 2008. In spring 2009, remodeling of the 30,000-square-foot garden-retail store was finished.

The interior renovation, especially, was not without challenges. Jere Stauffer was attempting to transform the old grocery store into a garden center. His initial budget was between \$800,000 and \$900,000. They were planning "the works"—new flooring, lighting, a new flower shop, space for casual furniture vignettes, etc. But improvements to the store's exterior were more costly than anticipated, and the entire project was at risk of going over budget. Stauffer

was asked to scale back his plans and keep the price tag around \$300,000.

To pull off the project, the entire SKH team rolled up their sleeves and got creative. Store employees lent contractors a hand with painting. One of the nursery employees turned out to be a pretty darn good carpenter, and helped with some trim and finish

work. Together, they dramatically changed the look and feel of the store.

"At first, losing more than half of your budget is a sucker punch,"

Stauffer said. "But then you gather your resolve and say, 'This is not going to get us down.' We're going to create the most inviting space we can. Having looked back on it now, yes, there are pieces we would've like to have had. But I don't think it would've gotten me another quarter-million dollars [in sales revenue]. It isn't what I dreamed. It wasn't the 'wow' I envisioned. But, doggone, from a business standpoint, it was the right thing to do."

*For more: Stauffers of Kissel Hill; [www.skh.com](http://www.skh.com)*

