



By Chad Husted, chusted@nrha.org

Finding the Time

How Retailers Have Expanded Their Community Endeavors

It's perfectly normal for entrepreneurs and small business owners to focus the majority of their time and efforts on their stores and business efforts. Running an independent home improvement business is hard work, and making the most of the available time during the day is already a difficult task.

But what if there was an extra hour in the day? Or maybe just an added 30 minutes that could be devoted to other areas of a retailer's life? What small tasks or accomplishments could this time be used for?

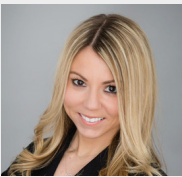
While the two retailers *Hardware Retailing* spoke with don't have that magical extra time in their days, they have found ways of organizing their time and their businesses to allow them to devote themselves to other initiatives. Whether it's giving back to community organizations or kick-starting a new program to benefit whole communities,

these retailers have learned to maximize the time not dedicated to business ventures.

Hardy Tan is the marketing manager at Benson Guam, but in his time away from his family's business he is pursuing programs and ideas that could help the entire island community of Guam develop sustainable farming techniques. On top of this project, Tan is also active on local boards and councils while keeping Benson Guam a go-to supplier for the community.

Jillian Sexton owns three independent hardware retail businesses, including two in Nova Scotia, Canada, and another three hours away on Prince Edward Island. In between balancing her three store locations, Sexton regularly donates her time and energy to her communities, including the Big Brothers Big Sisters program and multiple community fundraising projects.

Balancing Priorities



Jillian Sexton
Owner
Hector Building Supplies,
Sherwood Timber Mart,
Canada

“There is no magic bullet to finding time. It’s all about managing a schedule and deciding what amount of time and energy you can commit to.”

Still Growing

Jillian Sexton just can’t sit still. Whether it’s handling work calls during travel between her three stores or working with an organization to schedule a weekly lunch with a child in need of a mentor, Sexton is using every second of her day.

Even with the traditional obstacles that any multilocation business owner faces, Sexton has done what she always has in her business endeavors and her community projects: Hit the ground running. Now overseeing three retail locations (Sherwood Timber Mart is the

expansion location on Prince Edward Island), Sexton still maintains a dedicated schedule on philanthropic boards and assisting organizations she feels passionate about.

Some of Sexton’s projects include serving on the board of directors for the Tearmann Society for Abused Women, mentoring a child through Big Brothers Big Sisters of Pictou County and organizing the mayor’s golf tournament in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, which raises funds for a number of charitable causes, including a food bank and a local camp for children with diabetes.

“I have a firm belief in how organizations like Tearmann can benefit people in communities and help them live quality lives,” Sexton says. “As a female business owner, it hits home for me.”

Big Opportunities to Help

Dedication to strong time management also allows Sexton to volunteer on different levels, such as with Big Brothers Big Sisters. She reached out to the organization about working as a Big Sister, but initially, the time commitment looked to be too much for her schedule. That’s when Big Brothers Big Sisters suggested its mentorship program, which asks for one hour each week for lunch with a child who needs an adult’s influence and guidance.

“We’re all busy, and you can’t be everywhere at once. But I asked myself, ‘Why can’t I find an hour a week for lunch with someone who could use help?’” Sexton says. “Through being involved in these organizations, you hear stories about how lives have been affected for the better. Sometimes just through the simple act of helping out or volunteering a bit of time, it makes you want to find more ways to act.”

Sexton manages these projects while also splitting her time between her store locations in Nova Scotia and her recent acquisition on Prince Edward Island. She spends time each week traveling between the different locations and has worked to expand her community projects to her newest community on the island.

Sexton also cautions enthusiastic retailers to consider their own limits and that of their business when extending responsibilities to outside groups.

“There is no magic bullet to finding time. It’s all about managing a schedule and deciding what amount of time and energy you can commit to,” Sexton says. “I recently had to step away from a board position on a group I thoroughly believe in just because I wasn’t able to give all of my efforts.”



Jillian Sexton, owner of three retail locations in Canada, serves on several community boards and mentors children in her spare time.

Building a Community



Hardy Tan
Marketing Manager
Benson Guam,
independent operation
in Guam territory

“I’ve been able to see not only how our business can affect our communities, but what difficulties every business in Guam faces.”

Island Rising

With Guam lying 3,950 miles from Hawaii and nearly 6,000 from California, the U.S. territory presents a significant logistical hurdle. This has led to an abundance of obstacles for independent home improvement retailers like Hardy Tan, including many that few other retailers would even consider in their day-to-day business.

Guam has little to no agricultural industry, denying a category that independent retailers can often rely on to boost sales. The large number of immigrants in the labor force and new regulations that make obtaining a work visa more difficult has also eaten into the contractor market, which is key for Benson Guam’s operations.

Tan has helped develop his store, Benson Guam, into a diverse and prized hardware operation on the island, despite facing stiff competition from a newly arrived big-box retailer in close proximity. Tan applies his degree in business administration and his interest in languages and world cultures to expand Benson Guam into multiple categories, including appliances and firearms.

However, Tan’s efforts aren’t only meant to enhance his family’s business and compete against other retailers. Using his experiences living abroad, Tan is dedicated to introducing new ideas and improvements to his home.

“From my own experience and by joining with other community and business leaders in Guam, I’ve been able to see not only how our business can affect our communities, but what difficulties every business in Guam faces,” Tan says. “By improving our communities, we’re improving the quality of life for our neighbors and allowing businesses to thrive.”

Giving Back, Doing More

Some of Tan’s community projects include making Benson Guam a central sponsor for the renovation of the local baseball and football teams’ facilities. Tan and Benson Guam funded a new commentator’s box, concession stand and restroom facility. They also donated big-ticket items, like new lighting, and donated paint for a new look.

Tan has also aided in charitable causes by helping form the Mikkell Tan Foundation. Named after Tan’s late brother, the foundation has assisted in funding college scholarships and sponsors area youth sports teams to participate in overseas events and tournaments.

In addition to his efforts at Benson Guam, Tan is also dedicating efforts to a vertical farming initiative that he hopes will offer the entire island community a better option for fresh produce.

The vertical farm operation would allow crops to be farmed indoors, where they could be safe from the violent storms that can strike the island, and would not use the already limited amount of land available on the island territory.

For Tan, finding time for projects dedicated to improving the livelihood of an entire community is both a personal and professional labor of love.

“This kind of project not only provides less expensive, fresher foods, it can be an economic improvement and create jobs that pay well,” Tan says. “Less expensive food improves consumer spending, which can help the economy and therefore the lives of all citizens of Guam.” ➔



Hardy Tan (right) has devoted his own time and money into projects meant to improve life for all Guam residents in addition to helping run his business.