

# Groupe Savoie : “It took courage fuelled by necessity”



Groupe Savoie was founded in 1978 when Hector Savoie and his son Jean-Claude purchased two saw mills. The Savoie’s had a tough start to their enterprise when two years later, one of the mills was devastated in a fire. They really had to dig deep to keep the company alive and through their perseverance and initiative they were successful. Now, the organization is thriving as a leading producer of a wide range of hardwood products.

In fact, it was their innovation in wanting to include more of a value-added process to their manufacturing of hardwood that led them to be one of the biggest pallet manufacturers in Eastern Canada producing up to 2 million pallets a year.

Groupe Savoie currently exports up to 50,000 tonnes of pellets

a year from Belledune to the U.K. Their business has grown internationally by intentionally focusing on seeking out these customers.

In 1988, they worked with an equipment designer to build a traditionally unused type of sawmill that would saw four-foot lengths. This was revolutionary, because traditional mills only allowed for 15 percent of the tree to be used and 85 percent ended up being pulp with no market. To ensure sustainable forest practices, they have now invested in wood processing equipment to help facilitate using all of the trees they harvest, becoming one of the first hardwood suppliers to have this implemented. By having a vision of maximizing the use of the trees and then resourcing ways to do it, the company flourished.

“If we had stayed with a conventional sawmill, we wouldn’t be here,” shared Alain Bossé, President and Chief Operating Officer. “It was a tough business when the Savoies started out – it took courage fuelled by necessity. Now, we employ 600 people, and are truly able to give back to our community – a value that is critical to our organization.”

When Mr. Bossé was asked about the best tip for future entrepreneurs, he said:

“Our biggest asset is our people. We have a group of young people who are devoted, creative and loyal. Mills, equipment, anyone can have those but good quality people are hard to find, so we focus on how we can create an environment where they will want to stay.”

In addition to supporting their staff, they also are actively involved in fundraising activities throughout the year through the Hector Savoie Foundation, which helps people in their community.

As a family business a solid succession plan is critical to long term success. Nathalie Savoie, who grew up in the saw mills run by her father is set to take charge. This preparation will keep the company in good hands.

The management team recognizes the struggle of where they came from and use their vision of adding the maximum value to available forest resources to direct them in the company’s future.