

> **Sweetwater**

President receives award from local newspaper
PAGE 14

> **Middle C Music**

Celebrates "Middle C Music Day"
PAGE 14

> **Reverb**

Appoints European marketing manager
PAGE 15

RETAIL

PM MUSIC CENTER | BY ALEX HARRELL

THE CUSTOMERS' CREED

When *Music Inc.* last caught up with PM Music Center in 2009, the full-line dealer had just relocated to a roomier store not far from its previous location in Aurora, Illinois. At the time, owners Frank and Julie Pampenella were worried that the 9,000-square-foot shop would be too capacious.

Seven years later, PM Music has rented an additional 2,500 square feet of space. Now, its warehouse is brimming with flutes and French horns being prepped for rentals. Another room comprises a team of seven technicians repairing everything from clarinets and cellos to bassoons and baritone saxophones. The retail floor boasts Yamaha Shokunin wind instruments and has two separate rooms devoted to string instruments, guitars and drums.

"When we moved here we thought, 'Man! We've got so much space! What are we going to do with all this space?' But then we just ran out," Frank Pampenella laughed. "But it's not a bad thing."

And it's easy to see just how essential the extra warehouse space has been. Since 2009, PM Music has expanded its reach to over 250 schools and continues to provide lessons to over 400 students taught by 30



Frank Pampenella standing with his NAMM-inspired display.

Sustaining a simple sentiment has kept PM Music Center's sales strong throughout the years

subcontracted teachers. Given its growth, the team has nearly doubled and fluctuates between an additional 10 to 17 employees, depending on the season.

But despite the numerous changes the store has experienced throughout the years, its business strategy — and philosophy — have remained the same.

"We have the mantra that we're large enough to take care

of your needs but small enough to care," said Jason Pachona, the store's general manager.

"We've just been trying to improve upon what we already do," Pampenella put simply. "We've been doing this for 36 years now; certain things you find don't work. But the things that do work, you go over them and refine them."

WINNING WITH WHIZBANG

The No. 1 priority for PM Music has always been customer service. Pampenella holds weekly "all-star" meetings, where staff members can share their own customer service interactions experienced outside of the store.

"It's been great for us because it lets our customer service people be more aware of what's

happening to them,” Pampenella said. “So they know how frustrating it can be when you don’t have someone greet you in a proper amount of time.”

PM Music has been holding these meetings for years. Its latest customer service initiative was the implementation of WhizBang! — an online retail training program — within the past year. Every member of the team, even those who don’t deal directly with customers, go through WhizBang!’s training workshop.

“It’s just good to be aware of what’s happening because you want to be treated right,” Pampenella said. “When you get a chance to get a customer in here, we want that customer to make the perfect purchase and get what they need.”

Pampenella’s understanding that good service begins with a good team goes much deeper than just meetings and training; so much so that maintaining store morale might even be a higher priority than anything else.

“We have movie nights, we used to have a weekly yoga class that I started teaching and eventually got a professional teacher for,” Pampenella said. He gets down and dirty — literally — for his team.

As a result, it’s clear that the foundation of PM Music’s success is that every employee wants to be there; which is necessary, considering consumers have tons of choices in the Aurora area — what Pampenella called “the music mecca.”

LESSONS IN A LION’S DEN

The B&O-oriented dealers used to face competition with seven music stores within a five-mile radius, but several have since gone out of business.

Competition is still ripe, though.

“This is certainly the lion’s den for lesson studios,” Pachona said, guessing that there are nearly 20 lesson studios in the area. “It’s very saturated.”

But, staying true to the store’s philosophy, dealing with competition has a simple solution.

“All you can do is try to do what you do the best,” Pampenella shrugged. For PM Music, this means providing a safe environment for students. All 13 lesson rooms have windows for parents to check in as often (or little) as they like, and each employee goes through fingerprint-based background checks. Plus, the store offers a variety of lessons, including piano, bass, drums, sax, trumpet, vocals and ukulele.

Hiring the right people helps, too.

“We’re looking to hire a specific type of person; some people are phenomenal musicians, but not great teachers,” Pachona said.

“Nowadays, I just want to hire a personality,” Pampenella said. “I don’t care if they don’t know anything about the music business, as long as they’re happy and outgoing, that’s the type of person I want. We can always train them about products.”

But one of the main reasons why PM Music has sold more instruments over the years is because of not just the way its team treats the customer when they’re here, but the follow-up, Pampenella explained.

“You want to have a customer for life,” he said. “So if you treat them right — even if it means sending them somewhere else for something — they’re going to come back to you.” **MI**



From left: Jordan Kitt’s Music’s Chris Syllaba, Tony DeSare and Ray Fugere.

JORDAN KITT’S MUSIC | OPENING

Jordan Kitt’s Opens Flagship Showroom

Jordan Kitt’s Music celebrated the grand opening of its flagship showroom and music education center in Rockville, Maryland, on Jan. 25 with a special concert and reception, which featured Tony DeSare who performed a melding of contemporary, jazz, pop and classical piano.

“It was fantastic; we had almost 100 people, so we actually did it out on the sales floor,” said Chris Syllaba, president and CEO of Jordan Kitt’s Music. “We have a recital facility here, but it would’ve been too packed!”

To expand its showroom as well as consolidate its warehouse from a separate facility into an adjoining one, Jordan Kitt’s moved to the location in December 2016 and fully opened in mid-January. The 5,000-square-foot space features new and used pianos from manufacturers such as Yamaha, Bösendorfer, Roland, Cristofori and others. The facility also has a 1,500-square-foot music education center, offering piano instruction to hundreds of students weekly. It includes private teaching studios, a large group teaching facility, a waiting room for parents, and a recital hall that seats up to 70 — complete with a Yamaha CF series concert grand piano.

“The education center is a big focus for our business, but it’s also a good way of attracting potential purchasers to the store,” Syllaba said. The store expansion marks the store’s 105th year of continuous service to the customers, institutions and piano students in Washington, D.C., and continues to be the area’s oldest operating music store.

“We look forward to lasting another 105 years and beyond,” Syllaba said. jordankitts.com



Tony DeSare performs at Jordan Kitt’s new Rockville, Maryland, showroom.