

# Niles Herald-Spectator

## You can't call 'Mr. Staples'

By PAULINE FORTE Staff Writer  
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Few are the local family-owned businesses that survive nowadays.

But the five brothers and sister who own and work at Garvey's Office Products in Niles have been so successful at bucking that trend that they have outgrown their company space and will move in June from their current 40,000-square-foot location at 6001 Gross Point Road to a new 85,000-square-foot space at 7500 N. Caldwell Ave.

"We've expanded so rapidly, we've outgrown our space," Bernie Garvey, company president, said. "And with more space, we'll have more opportunity to keep growing."

Garvey's has more than 2,000 customers in the Chicagoland area alone, reported Dan, one of the sales-manager brothers.

The company, first known as Schiller-Schmidt, was founded 81 years ago by Alex Schiller, for whom the siblings' father, Bernard Garvey, worked. Garvey bought the company in the early 1970s and renamed it.

The father retired, but six of his eight children took over. In addition to Bernie and Dan, Kevin is also a sales manager, Ken is the operations director, Sheila Gartland the marketing director, and Michael an account representative.

"We're a tighter family," Dan said. "We grew up with a deep respect for each other."

With sales increasing this year, Garvey's expects to make about \$30 million in annual sales, besting 2006's \$25 million sales.

The company sells just about anything businesses might need in their offices, from janitorial equipment to legal supplies and general office products. Garvey's buys from 350 different manufacturers, including 3M, Avery, Fellowes and Sanford.

Among their biggest-selling supplies are copy paper and toner cartridges, and there is a growing demand for coffee, Sheila said.

"We can get customers anything they want in their office. We'll go many steps further than other suppliers to help them get what they want," Dan said.

Orders are taken by phone, e-mail and fax, and deliveries are made to the Chicagoland area on a same-day or next-day basis. Although orders can be delivered across the country, the company's 16 trucks focus on an area within an 80-mile radius of Chicago, Dan said.

Prior to their current Niles location 10 years ago, the Garveys' 12,500-square-foot office and warehouse were in Chicago, on North Elston Avenue. The next move will allow the siblings to get further into the office-furniture market with an on-site furniture showroom.

A key to the company's success is customer service and efficiency. Each of the company's 55 employees is trained to take orders and help customers, Dan said. Having great employees who understand what it is to take care of customers is what matters the most at Garvey's, he said.

In addition to its commercial Web site for registered customers ([www.garveysop.com](http://www.garveysop.com)), Garvey's is launching a retail site ([www.shopgarveys.com](http://www.shopgarveys.com)), for home businesses, school supplies and other interests.

The advantage of being a family-owned business as opposed to a large corporation is that customers become familiar with the Garvey's staff and can talk directly to a family employee, Dan said.

"We model ourselves as the great family business in the supply industry, and our growth has put us in that position," Dan said. "You can't pick up the phone and call Mr. Staples. We're open between 6 a.m. and 7 p.m. They can't compete with our service."

Garvey's is part of a buying group of 100 independent dealers across the nation, among whom it has the highest number of sales per employee and the largest percentage of growth, Dan said.



Garvey family members (from left to right) including Ken, Dan, Kevin, Sheila Gartland and Bernie, stand in the new warehouse space for Garvey Office Supplies. Bernie, Dan and Ken live in Glenview; Sheila lives in Oak Park; Kevin lives in Park Ridge. (Jason Brown/Staff Photographer)

The buying group gives the company the pricing power to compete with Staples and Office Depot, he said.

Among the many things that have changed since his father was running the company, Dan explained, technology has made huge differences. "My dad was able to spend his time out of the office all day selling. Today, everything is on a 'I have to have it now' time frame," he said. "Now we're positioning ourselves to be unparalleled in this industry, price- and service-wise."

In addition to its new Web site, the supply company created a new, user-friendly catalog in 2006. Sheila and a Michigan-based graphics firm worked on creating the catalog, which is easier on the eye and laid out logically so people can find things, the sister said.

"It is a 100-percent reflection of what customers have asked us to carry," Dan said, noting that the pricing is consistent throughout the year.

Dan gave an example of how the company is devoted to making things easy for its customers. One patron asked whether it would be possible for Garvey's to sell them candies with the rest of their supply order so he wouldn't have to make a special trip to the store to get the sweets for his office. Garvey's delivered the candies — and now has included them in the new catalog.

Another customer needed a shoe-shine machine the next day. Once the order is made, Dan said, it then becomes Garvey's problem how to find and deliver the product.

Finally, Garvey's is looking into "green" solutions "to shrink our carbon footprint," Dan said. In addition to using energy-saving light bulbs in the new building and 100%-biodegradable binders, Garvey's has developed a toner-recycling program.

Each quarter, the company will pool all of its cartridges together to raise money for a charitable organization — Chicago's Mercy Home for Boys and Girls, a long-term residential home for at-risk young men and women ages 11 to 21, Easter Seals, Misericordia & Uhlich Children's Home will benefit from the program this year.

Individually, the rebate on recycled cartridges sent to a Tennessee recycling center is not much, but when accumulated over time, Sheila said, "we can all make a difference."

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