

Loconsolo Paint

This Coney Island–based institution was founded in 1953 by paint contractors who count the World Trade Center among their biggest projects.

Even though he was born into the paint industry, Jon Chiaro never envisioned himself managing a paint store. “I went to school for finance and international business, and I didn’t like the people I went to class with, or even the industry,” he recalled. So he worked for the family business part-time while he was in college, stacking paint cans in the warehouse, just as his cousin Paul did the year before he graduated. “The idea was that we would build the business: We were one store, with one truck and six employees. That was in 2002.”

Fast-forward 16 years, and Jon and his cousin Paul have steadily expanded Loconsolo Paint from one location to four, with 30 employees across all of their stores. While the Coney Island location remains their business headquarters and is the most well known, the Williamsburg location opened at the end of June. Their clientele includes a mix of large and small painting contractors, government agencies, hospitals, schools and local facilities of all types. The pair hopes to continue to expand their business the same way they have for the past 16 years: through a mix of reliability and flexibility.

Their road to success wasn’t paved overnight: It involved a dedication to improving outside sales and seeking out a diverse customer base, which was one of Chiaro’s first tasks when he started working at the store. Building local awareness meant everything from making cold calls and approaching people who were painting



on the street, to setting up meetings with purchasing departments and owners of local paint shops. After that, word of mouth helped the store gain a reputation as a good source for specialty products, with a dedicated, client-focused staff. “The fact that we’re a smaller company gives us an advantage,” Chiaro said. “Some customers are price-sensitive and others are service-sensitive, so we really try to identify those sources of pain and alleviate it efficiently and quickly.”

Brooklyn residents also appreciate the store’s connection to the city’s history. Before establishing the Coney Island location of Loconsolo Paint, Chiaro’s grandfather founded the Belt Painting Company, a contracting firm responsible for the upkeep of several New York landmarks, such as the World Trade Center, the Verrazano-Narrows, Brooklyn and Kosciuszko bridges, and Shea and Yankee stadiums, as well as several Las Vegas casinos. He dissolved the business in the ‘90s to devote time to the brick-and-mortar store.

Today, the Coney Island location continues to operate as the original store, a warehouse and the administrative office for the Marine Park, Bronx and Williamsburg

stores. Chiaro's title is executive vice president; his cousin Paul D'Auria is vice president of operations. The two work together to bring in and develop new accounts, as well as hire all employees and manage each store as an individual thriving business. "We have stores where there is a strong retail environment, where we can connect with the local community and be the choice for local painting, maintenance and renovation needs," Chiaro said.

And while the threat of big-box retailers like Lowe's and Home Depot exists, the two work hard to make sure each of their stores stocks products that meet the needs of each customer—and that they hire dedicated employees customers can trust. "People are seeking advice and guidance, and we find that we have great employees who are trained and passionate about what they do," Chiaro said. "Sometimes that gets lost in other companies."

While he admits that maintaining a consistent level of service will be a challenge as the business grows, he doesn't



A few guys from Belt Painting, the Loconsolo's original paint contracting business, circa 1958. Jack Loconsolo, Jon Chiaro's great grandfather, is in the suit, top left; Chiaro's grandfather, John Loconsolo, is in the bottom row, far left. The others were painters who worked for the company.

worry about the dedication of the employees at each store: Some have been with the company for 25 to 30 years, a loyalty that reflects how well the company treats its employees. And while experience in the industry is helpful, it's not required: All managers and employees receive product training in color matching and have the enthusiasm and stamina to work long hours without sacrificing customer service. "Paint is an experience, and that's what we're trying to deliver," he said. "We hire honest, honorable people we can trust to represent our name—and our brand—the right way."

Keeping employees happy is important to Chiaro and his cousin, and so is diversity. Workers hail from many countries, including Peru, Argentina, Chile, Mexico, Russia, Ukraine, El Salvador, Honduras, China and India. The company also employs women: "My mother runs the wallpaper showroom and decorating area," Chiaro said with a smile. And the company is eager to hire more women: It

hired two female salespeople last year.

If a balanced mix of genders and nationalities addresses the shopping needs of a diverse urban population, diversity in language also helps: All managers are bi- or trilingual. "We have clients from all parts of the earth, speaking a multitude of languages, and our staff is able to accommodate that," Chiaro said. All of these factors have earned the company a client loyalty that extends beyond Brooklyn: Some contracts have brought them into Connecticut and New Jersey; they've also shipped products to Florida. The stores carry full lines of Benjamin Moore paint, as well as venetian plasters and waxes by Meoded and Modern Masters.

Chiaro admits that owning a paint store is a recession-proof business, but that's not the reason he chooses to stay in it: "I love what I do, and I love working with families. I love that at the end of the day when we make a dollar, it goes to a family. I also love working with my cousin—we wouldn't be successful without this partnership." When asked what he'd do if he



could do anything else, he considers real estate or finance but then remembers the advantages of running a small business. "When you're in a corporate structure, there's all that red tape to cut through. Here, we just do it. And that's an advantage." ●

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