

# McGinnis Lumber Company – A Century of Changes and Constants

One hundred years have passed since J. Earl McGinnis founded The McGinnis Lumber Company, Inc. in Meridian, MS. Economic, political, and industry conditions changed over those years, but the philosophy that drives the company today remains constant: “We do business equitably, and understand the only unique quality we bring to the marketplace is our reputation, which has to be earned. We do our best to treat our suppliers, customers, and employees with respect”, said J.E. (Jim) McGinnis, III, President. “We have employed many people in our history, four of them have been named McGinnis; I never forget who is responsible for the success achieved by our company.”

Earl McGinnis served as President until his death in 1969.

James E. McGinnis, Jr. served that capacity for 36 years until turning those responsibilities over to Jim in 2005.

The company is one of the oldest wholesalers in the country operating under continuous family management. Its primary purpose has always been to provide a quality product at a competitive price, and to transact business with a high level of integrity and trust.

Earl's tenure was characterized by financing Pine sawmills in return for finished product to sell, and survived the Great Depression and WWII. James helped pioneer Western species (utilizing contracts with mills and railroads) to retail markets in the South, while navigating the Korean and Vietnam wars, price freezes during the Nixon years, and dramatic changes societally and politically. There were good times and bad, but the company persevered.

Jim joined the business in 1980. After enduring difficulties in the lumber business due to recessions in the 80's and 90's, he began to question the long-term viability of perpetuating the same business model. The company had already begun to renew focus on Southern Pine, but still had a strong focus on retail and homebuilding-related sales. Railroad deregulation, the advent of wholesale distribution and big-box stores, mill-direct sales to customers that historically had been the province of the wholesaler, and other market and economic changes convinced Jim that the company would not survive without making a radical change in suppliers and customer base. The mid-nineties saw a gradual shift towards an industrial customer base, and that strategy has served the company well for over 25 years. “My dad told me late in life that he didn't recognize this company,” Jim laughed.



Four generations of McGinnis Lumber Company, Inc.: Jim, Earl, James and Davis.

Davis McGinnis joined the company in 2014, and buys Pine and hardwood in support of the sales team, plus significant amounts for his own sales. Davis said with a smile, “My Dad never pressured me to join the business, but my grandad sure made it clear that he wanted me to.”

He has an exercise science degree from Ole Miss (where he met his wife, Karli; they have a one-year old son named Parks), but along the way realized that joining the family business was his true calling. “Another sawdust breathing McGinnis,” Jim says, and adds that “Davis has the family gift of gab, and an unteachable feel for the market and trading, a strong work ethic, and is respectful to everyone in our company, our suppliers and our

customers. He will have a long, successful career in this industry because he does things the right way.”

Davis continues: “We still do business with a handshake and verbal agreements. Our mill partnerships are our lifeblood.

“Our goal is to continue to grow and diversify; we constantly are expanding our customer and supplier base. If we can continue to do that, maintain good employees and the positive environment our company strives for, we will be fine in the future.”

Jim said, “Davis will have to stay aware of coming changes, adapt to them as we always have, while always maintaining what is currently working well. I'm supremely confident that he and the rest of our staff will make good progress towards our second hundred years.”

McGinnis has had a very long relationship with NAWLA, with both Jim and his dad serving as Chairman.

“NAWLA is about relationship-building, and our company and myself personally have benefited greatly from our long membership,” Jim continued. “My philosophy is to never let business get in the way of life. Meaning, work is important and we need to do it well. But it's also very important for our people to attend ballgames, school plays, and travel to see family; in other words, the most important things.” About business, he says, “I'm proud of our family business, and thrilled that Davis is here as the fourth generation. Business success is wonderful, but my legacy is my family and the friends I've made along the way. I'm truly blessed.”

**Learn more at [www.mcginnislumber.com](http://www.mcginnislumber.com).**