

The History of Magbee Contractors Supply

It was 1954, and brothers James and Charles Magbee had come to the realization that the time was ripe for opportunity in Metro Atlanta. The area was finally coming to life after an uneasy end to the Korean Conflict in 1953, and the flood of soldiers who would soon be returning home from overseas would be looking for homes. Under the Veteran's Adjustment Act of 1952 all who served in the war were eligible for low-cost, zero down payment home loans; this bill would enable thousands to escape the city - or the farm - and finally move to the suburbs in pursuit of the American Dream - home ownership.

Nationwide, nearly 1.5 million Korean Conflict soldiers used this program to obtain home loans before it was officially ended in 1963. Many of them bought those homes in Metro Atlanta; by the latter part of the decade, the city's population had surpassed the one million mark, and Atlanta herself had grown from 33 to 118 square miles.

To meet the rising demand for building materials, the Magbee brothers opened shop in a small hamlet located in DeKalb county known as Decatur GA. The store sat on College Avenue, and for the first few years was staffed with only seven employees. In these early days, Jim and Charles had a delivery fleet of three flat-bed trucks and one pickup truck.

Based on its past, this was a surprising spot for a building materials store. The little town was locally known for being resistant to growth; back in 1830, The Western and Atlantic Railroad had sought to make Decatur the southernmost hub of its rail line, but city officials had refused the offer, citing "pollution and noise" among their reasons. So the railroad just moved a little further to the west - southwest, and stopped the line at a town they quickly built and named Terminus. Eventually, Terminus would become Atlanta, and over the coming decades, the city at the end of the line would continue to grow and expand until finally surrounding the incorporated Decatur on all four sides.

Six years after opening in Decatur, Magbee Brothers Lumber had outgrown the tiny College Avenue location, and moved further from the city, closer to the suburbs that were bubbling up all over DeKalb, Fulton and Gwinnett counties. They choose a mill town - Scottdale - that was situated near the major east-west corridor at that time, US Highway 78. Once on Highway 78, it was a relatively quick ride from Scottdale to most destinations, including downtown Atlanta, Stone Mountain, Snellville, Tucker, and even Athens. And if the materials needed to go north or south, then US 29 was right around the corner.

I-285 wasn't completed until 1969; when it opened, Magbee Brothers Lumber was located only ten minutes from the new perimeter highway that boasted, at the time, of being "four lanes - two to choose from, each way."

By the mid-80's, business was booming, and Magbee Brothers Lumber was riding a wave of prosperity, but it was becoming increasingly difficult for the company to service the builders who were working the suburbs in Gwinnett, Fulton and Cobb. Cobb and Gwinnett were consistently posting record numbers of building permits every year, while the number of permits issued in DeKalb county was dwindling. Once again sensing that the time was ripe for opportunity, the leadership of Magbee Brothers Lumber decided to leave Scottdale and head to the heart of Gwinnett County.

Duluth is the second largest city in Gwinnett county - Lawrenceville, the county seat, is the largest - and the Duluth zip code boasts some of the most affluent neighborhoods in northern Georgia. St. Ives, St. Marlo, and Sugarloaf Country Club are just some of the names of the sprawling developments that reside in this area. The spot that Magbee Brothers Lumber choose as their next home was ideally located to serve not only these subdivisions, but similar ones that were springing up in nearby Roswell. The new lumberyard was built from the ground up, on a stretch of two lane highway named Pleasant Hill Road, the same road that was host to the largest shopping mall in the area at that time: Gwinnett Place Mall, which opened in 1980. With Interstate 85 just a few short miles away, and a brand new facility under their feet, when employees of Magbee Brothers Lumber moved to Duluth in January 1986, they were ready to ride the wave of the Metro Atlanta building boom into the next century.

In 1989, a familiar face around the lumberyard assumed leadership of the company: Bob Magbee, son of Charles Magbee. Bob had grown up in the business, spending afternoons and summers with his father and uncle making deliveries and unloading railcars. After graduating from college, Bob had started his own millwork shop in nearby Tucker to supply custom doors and windows to builders. When his uncle decided to retire, Bob moved his shop into the Duluth facility, and took on the role of president of Magbee Brothers Lumber. He changed the name to Magbee Contractors Supply that same year to reflect the company's vision of being the supplier of choice for builders and contractors in the Metro Atlanta area.

By the start of the 21st century, Magbee Contractors Supply had outgrown the Duluth facility. They opened a sister location in Cherokee county to service the Cobb and other outlying areas, but the relentless traffic on Pleasant Hill Road had failed to ease the challenges of building material deliveries for the Duluth operation. The county was discussing the installation of a median on the busy highway, and the construction of an overpass at the nearby Buford Highway intersection had been on the table for years. Either of these projects would be crippling to the company.

It was time to move - again.

Barrow County was the spot chosen for the next facility.

Just outside Winder, in a rural community named Carl, twenty acres of pasture was transformed over the course of a year into a bustling lumberyard, complete with a multi-million dollar railroad siding. And on a weekend in early 2003, Magbee Contractors Supply closed down the Duluth location, and began operations in their new facility.

From Decatur to Winder, with a few stops in between, the little storefront opened by the Magbee brothers in 1954 has since grown into a \$100 million dollar business, with locations in Winder, Ball Ground, and Huntsville, Alabama.

