



The History of Great Southern Wood, YellaWood® and Yella Fella

Great Southern Wood Preserving, Incorporated (Great Southern Wood), got its start in 1970 when Jimmy Rane, a senior in law school, tried to mediate a family dispute concerning his late father-in-law's estate, which included a small wood treating operation in the small town of Abbeville, Alabama.

Little did Rane know that forty years later he would be a leading force behind the industry's leading brand, YellaWood® brand pressure treated pine, and that "Yella Fella," the character he plays in the company's commercials, would become something of an advertising icon.

Instead of walking away from the small, backyard fence post manufacturing plant, Rane decided he would continue to pursue his law degree and prospective legal career while trying to get the business healthy enough to sell and "come out whole." It never happened.

Now, four decades and a number of recessions later, the then-fledgling business is the market leader in a \$4-plus billion industry with more than a half-billion dollars in annual sales. Rane has built a household brand name in a commodity category where other consumer brands don't exist.

The "Frank Perdue" of Lumber

In the first decade of operation, Great Southern Wood grew, as many new small businesses do, by identifying a product and a market, working hard to add value, and squeezing out the smallest of margins.

As business began to grow, Rane found himself devoting more time to the lumber business and less time to his law practice.

Restless to grow the business and build something bigger, Rane Accepted an invitation to attend a resident-study program at the Harvard Business School (the *Owner/President Management Program*).

One of the case studies that attracted his attention while at Harvard was

that of Perdue Chicken and its patriarch Frank Perdue, the pioneer in branding commodity products.

It was then that Rane realized the importance of establishing a brand name that consumers recognize and trust. And he set out to do just that.

The company embarked on sponsorship of college football coaches' weekly shows throughout the South, where college sports are followed with passion and enthusiasm. It was a great combination for both the brand and for Rane, leading to friendships between Rane and such legendary coaches as (former University of Alabama Football Coach) Gene Stallings and (former Auburn University Football Coach) Pat Dye. Both Stallings and Dye now serve on the Great Southern Wood board of directors.

When the company began featuring collegiate football and basketball coaches in humorous commercials, the spots became so popular throughout the South that one well-known coach once remarked that his appearance in the ad series helped his recruiting success.

Soon, however, the ambitious and marketing-savvy Rane realized that a broader approach was needed--resulting in the birth of both the YellaWood® brand and Yella Fella character in 2004.

The message of the earlier advertising had always been, and continues to be, "look for the lumber with the little yellow tag on the end," signifying that the wood was a pressure treated product of Great Southern Wood.

The company had invested hundreds of thousands of dollars through the years in consumer advertising and had built a significant awareness in the marketplace. So much so, in fact, that it was able to obtain a federal registration for the "little yella tag" as its trademark icon, and YellaWood® brand products became the most widely recognized of any in the category.

Founder and CEO of the company, Rane had never been afraid to be the face of the company in its advertising, but Yella Fella took the notion to a whole new plateau. Rane didn't hesitate, slipping into a cowboy character that was a little bit whimsical and incredibly affable.

Cowboys had always engendered a good warm feeling among most Americans, Rane concluded. He remembered his days going to the Archie Theater in Abbeville, and he remembered the serial Western previews and trailers, where the hero usually found himself in trouble at

the end of each week's episode, closing with the message "To be continued..."

Rane has brought these vivid memories back to life for a new generation, thanks to an innovative television advertising campaign that puts Yella Fella in a predicament at the end of each commercial and continues the story the next week.

The Code of the West Returns

Old Western movies had a message--that good triumphs over evil. It is a message that today's cynical society has all but forgotten, Rane believes. "It's not a complicated message, but one that we need to continue to reinforce with people of all ages and especially young people," he said.

The message emphasizes values of honesty, service, character, integrity, patriotism and family, among others.

That message of values is embodied in the Code of the West, a gentlemen's agreement to certain rules of conduct, and though it was never recorded the same way twice, it was respected everywhere on the range.

"We live in a time when young people need to hear that good guys don't finish last and that truth and justice can prevail," Rane says. "It is so easy for young people to get discouraged but the message of the Old West offers hope. And it teaches us how to live."

It is a message Rane hopes his advertising will rekindle with people who see it.

"The message we need to borrow from the Old West is counter to much of what we are confronted with these days. It is more important than ever," he emphasizes.

If it sounds like Rane is a crusader, perhaps he is. Even though society often sends messages that are 180 degrees from *The Code of the West* and *The Golden Rule*, Rane is fighting valiantly to get the message across. But it's not the first time he's "gone against the grain."

Don't Follow the Crowd

One of the principles Rane learned early in his career was to blaze his own trail and not necessarily to go where everybody else is going.

"My philosophy is buy when everyone else is selling and sell when

everyone else is buying,” says Rane. “That is the way real value is created.”

Value is exactly what he’s hoping to create with his latest advertising effort. While the economy in general and the home-building industry in particular experienced perhaps their most challenging year in history in 2009, Rane and his team at Great Southern Wood launched their most aggressive business development effort ever.

Through recent acquisitions in Texas, Arkansas, Missouri and Mississippi he has added new geographic markets that now include 35 major television markets. The 2010 advertising is the second season of a “cliffhanger” approach that borrows heavily from the serials Rane used to see at the Archie Theater.

As with the 2009 campaign, Rane invited Grand Ole Opry members *Riders In The Sky* to become a part of the campaign, further enhancing the Old Western movie motif of the ads. The commercials were all shot on location in Moab and Monument Valley, UT and on the original set of many old Westerns like *The Quick and The Dead* near Tucson, AZ. He sought the technical collaboration of such celebrated experts as veteran Western movie stuntman Dean Smith, legendary actor Dale Robertson, and World Champion Rodeo Cowboy “Cody” Bill Smith.

Consumers are able to join the fun of the advertising through an interactive Web site, www.yellafella.com, that enables them to view the commercial storyline as it unfolds each week, locate YellaWood® brand dealers, test their shooting gallery skills in a game called *The Shoot Down*, and enter to instantly win prizes in *The YellaWood® Backyard Bonanza \$75,000 Sweepstakes*.

At the end of the day, Rane hopes the unusual approach will result in added market share as well as making the world better for the next generation.

In fact, he has put his name behind this hope for a better future. Through the Jimmy Rane Foundation, established in 2000, nearly \$1 million in scholarships has been awarded to more than 100 young people who probably would not have been able to go to college without the success of Great Southern Wood Preserving, YellaWood® brand products, and Yella Fella.

Where will the story of Yella Fella go next? As Rane and everyone else on the Great Southern team know, it’s “to be continued...”

-The End-