

Time With The Boss: Kurt Schmidt, A. E. Schmidt Billiard Company

Company Address:

720 Koeln Ave.

St. Louis, MO 63111

www.aeschmidtbilliards.com

Industry:

Custom billiard tables and restoration services

Education:

Started working full-time right out of high school—started with the family business part-time at age 13.

Family:

Karen Schmidt, wife has worked for the company since 1983. Three children: Michael, 21; Stephanie, 16; and Rachel, 14.

What was the smartest thing your company did in the past year?

“We had not attended the billiard trade show for several years. This year, we attended the show and met many new dealers to sell and install our tables. This allows A. E. Schmidt to continue to offer our custom tables to people across the country.”

What will be your company’s challenges in the next year?

“Increased competition—from the Internet as well as Chinese imports—continues to be a challenge for A. E. Schmidt. The main challenge, and opportunity, lies in making people aware that U.S. manufacturers, such as

A. E. Schmidt, offer the best pool tables and game room equipment, offering quality and custom options. Most A. E. Schmidt tables outlast their original owners, allowing them to be passed down as a family heirlooms; There aren’t very many products you can say that about.”

From a business standpoint, who do you look up to?

“My uncle—Harold Schmidt. He was hard-working and dedicated, still working until a month before his death at 92. The females in my life—my wife, my attorney and several accountants. All have stuck by me and given me great advice—even when I did not ask for it.”

What’s the hottest trend in your industry?

“For us, it is all customization. As with many other industries, customers seek custom items to reflect their homes and lifestyles. From a pool table that converts into a dining table to a cedar table with steer horn inlays, people want something unique to fit in and reflect their home. Most people would be surprised to learn how small the price difference is between getting exactly what you want and something off the rack.”

What is the best business advice you’ve ever received?

“There have been so many who have given me great advice—both personal contacts as well as history’s great thinkers. Oscar Wilde: ‘A cynic is a person who knows the cost of everything and the value of nothing.’ Edwin Schmidt: ‘You can’t do business from an

empty wagon.’”

What is new in your company?

“We have created an innovative pool table that doubles as a modern, elegant dining table. Offering unusual woods, such as hickory and cedar, has also proven popular. On the business side, we’ve recently signed several new dealers to help bring our pool tables to people across the country.”

Do you have a company mantra?

“To custom build the best-quality tables for our customers—and provide personal service. We don’t really believe in titles or catchy slogans around here. We all work together to meet customers’ needs. I still work with customers to design tables and regularly answer our main phone line.”

What has made you successful in your industry?

“We have always focused on doing one thing well—pool tables—instead of trying to be everything to everybody. We have been able to acquire a wealth of knowledge and develop creative ways to build and design pool tables that are more accommodating to families’ homes and lifestyles.”

What do you like to do in your free time?

“My free time belongs to my family. I get more of a bang watching them have fun with Boy Scouts, music, and athletic events than anything I could dream up for myself. However, I do admit to being one of those nerdy middle-aged people who loves trivia.”

