



Customers Are Key for East Coast Retailer

By Paul Wahl, Editor

Rick's Saddle Shop began life as a Western store. Today, the four stores owned by Rick Wills are among the leading English shops in the country.

"I was a Western rider, I knew nothing about English," Wills said. "I think that has been part of our success."

Wills explained that the business was built by listening to customers and stocking what they want to buy, rather than what he'd prefer to sell them.

Whatever the key, the formula has worked. From its original 1,000 square feet in Englishtown, N.J. in 1978, the business has grown to encompass four stores, including the newest addition in Cream Ridge, N.J. That facility, completed in 2005, includes a main showroom of 12,000 square feet housing both English and Western tack and apparel, a 10,000 square-foot feed warehouse and a 1,200 square-foot education center, equipped with state-of-the-art computerized presentation equipment.

Each of the locations is a reflection of the area it's in and the type of customers it serves.

Wills began his business career working in New York City for Coca Cola and later Dr. Pepper. He started the store as a hobby in 1978. The first year it was open, Wills' wife worked to pay the bills, and since the couple couldn't afford a second car, Wills rode a bicycle to work.

Today, cars are plentiful but the work ethic remains, as well as the customer orientation.

"We try to be bigger, we try to be better, we try to be more interesting, we try to stock more than anyone else," Wills said, "But our biggest strength is our people."



Rick Wills got his start in business in the soft drink industry. Today, he's one of the leading voices in the English sector of the Equine Trade Industry.



Rick's Saddle Shop in Cream Ridge includes more than 30,000 square-feet of store, storage and instructional space.