

Celebrating 56 Years in Business

Norton Sporting Goods

Store Profile

- **Location:** Waldo, OH
- **Owner:** James Dean
- **Years in Business:** 56 years
- **Square footage, store floor:** 2,000
- **Square footage, shooting lanes:** N/A
- **Total business square footage:** 2,500
- **Staffing:** Full-time: 7; Part-time: 8
- **Bow Lines:** Mathews and Mission
- **Arrow Lines:** Easton, Gold Tip, Altra, Carbon Express, Barnett and TenPoint
- **Crossbow Lines:** Mission, Barnett, TenPoint, Wicked Ridge and Ravin
- **Estimated annual revenue:** 2.5 million
- **Revenue percentage (estimate) generated by bowhunting:** 10 percent
- **Store History:** Since 1968, Norton has provided their customers with firearms, ammunition, scopes, muzzle-loaders, knives, archery equipment, fishing tackle, live bait and all the

knowledge they need to enjoy them. They offer many services for the sportsman, including minor gunsmithing, gun cleaning, bore-sighting, scope mounting and bow repair. Norton also provides a layaway program and they will special-order any item not in stock.

Norton employees share their customers' love of shooting, hunting and fishing sports and will always be happy to swap stories. They take great pride in their outstanding personalized customer service and local hunting and fishing knowledge. Norton is conveniently located next to the Delaware Wildlife Area and the public Delaware Rifle & Archery Range. They are also just a few short miles from the Delaware State Park and campground.

Norton Sporting Goods began in 1968 when Howard and Susan Dean purchased the small hunting and fishing store just west of the Delaware Wildlife Area. They immediately went to work remodeling the interior of the store to create an attractive and appealing retail space. The first major addition to the store came in the early 1970s when

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the old "Bait Shed" was demolished and a new tackle and live bait area was added. It was also at this time that the roofline was changed to the barn style that the store has today.

The store has always been a family business. During the '70s, '80s, and '90s, all three of the Dean kids helped out at the store. In 2001, Howard and Susan's youngest son, James, took over direct management of business operations and in 2009, the building was expanded again, adding more display space for archery, tackle, and firearms.

Retailing Q & A

Inside Archery: What general business principles have allowed Norton Sporting Goods to flourish and enjoy

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Norton Sporting Goods owner James Dean



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such long-term success?

Dean: Everything we do is about our customers having a positive experience in our shop. From the initial greeting at the door to a quick purchase or a long interaction with lots of questions and stories, we aim to treat our customers like family and give them the “hometown” treatment. Our expectation is that our products and pricing bring customers in the door and our personalized, friendly service brings them back.

Inside Archery: What types of sporting goods categories does Norton Sporting Goods carry, and how do these fit into the activities most common or popular in your region?

Dean: We carry firearms, ammo, muzzleloaders, knives, compound bows, crossbows, fishing tackle, live bait and a host of accessories to support these products. We are located near the Delaware Wildlife Area, which includes a state park, a lake and a shooting and archery range. The 1,330-acre lake provides great fishing and waterfowl hunting, and the wildlife area is open to all types of hunting, including small game, varmints and white-tailed deer. The Delaware State Park is also available for bowhunting only and is a destination for in-state and out-of-state hunters. The shooting



and archery ranges are state-of-the-art outdoor facilities. The availability of all of these activities close to our shop has certainly enabled us to flourish over the years.

Inside Archery: In direct relation to archery seasons and the bowhunters who frequent your shop, what products sell best in your area? What do you attribute this to?

Dean: We sell a good variety of crossbows and are exclusively a Mathews Archery dealer. Due to our proximity to great whitetail hunting, we do a lot of “on-the-spot” repairs and upgrades to equipment during the season. We have a great staff of experienced hunters who understand our customers’ needs and

are always able to find a fix. Arrows, sights, rests and quivers are among our top-selling accessories.

Inside Archery: What percentage of your customers purchase vertical bows (traditional and compound) compared to crossbow sales in your shop?

Dean: Crossbows account for about 65 percent of our sales, and vertical bows account for 35 percent.

Inside Archery: How do your crossbow customers differ from your vertical bow clientele, and how must your approach to these two groups differ?

Dean: Our customers purchase crossbows for many different reasons. Some-

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times they just want to be accurate without spending a lot of time practicing, or perhaps they've had an injury that prevents them from utilizing a vertical bow. Crossbows also allow our customers who are new to the sport to become successful much more quickly. In the past, there was a stigma associated with crossbows and using them to hunt was considered "cheating" because of their ease of use and consistent accuracy. That has certainly changed in the past 20 years. A few bowhunters may see the crossbow hunters as inferior, but we see it as an opportunity to get more people involved in a sport we love and learn to hunt with more success and fewer failures. A lot of our customers have *both* a vertical bow and a crossbow in their arsenal and use them depending on the situational hunt.

Inside Archery: Based on consumer trends at your shop, what are some of the best-selling items within the other respective product categories you carry?

Dean: We have seen many products do well, but recently Altra Arrows, G5 Megameat crossbow broadheads, Black Widow deer lures and Wildlife Research Golden Rope Scent Kits have been particularly hot.

Inside Archery: How important are archery distributors such as Kinsey's to



your shop in helping fill orders monthly or annually and why?

Dean: Kinsey's is our main archery distributor and they have been instrumental in the growth of our archery department. Their large selection of products has helped us carry a wide range of items at reasonable prices and they are able to get them to us quickly and hassle-free. They have also proved valuable by leveraging technology to capture market trends, give product advice and improve the supply chain. They truly treat us as partners in success.

Inside Archery: What approaches have you developed to help cultivate and retain quality employees who provide the level of customer service you demand?

Dean: We treat employees like we do our customers, as family. Because we are small and customer-focused, we often don't have time for comprehensive training. Experienced employees teach new and younger employees on the job and through positive examples. We try to find people who are industry like-minded, motivated and able to work autonomously. And frankly, we have fun. We spend a lot of time laughing and keeping the mood light.

Inside Archery: What types of promotional programs, sales or in-store activities do you use to keep customers

coming through your doors during slow periods of the season?

Dean: Although sales, in-store promotions and marketing continually work well, we also like to focus on activities outside of general sales that drive business. These include raffles, archery and shooting-sport related events, and a center of attention on personal services that set us apart from our competition. We also leverage social media as much as possible to promote business and highlight sport-related activities. It's the small things that count and our customers know they can come to us for almost anything hunting, fishing, archery and firearms related.

Inside Archery: Are there any other bits of advice you can offer dealers or department managers for creating a store atmosphere that customers trust and keep returning to?

Dean: Give your customers 100 percent all the time and drive your employees to see the benefits of building relationships. Be honest. If you don't have the answer, find it. Customers appreciate it when we go the extra mile and show them how important they are to us. We aren't in the business of selling products; we are in the business of selling positive experiences, whether it be in our shop or in the field. **IA**

