



HONORING THE 2020 RV/MH HALL OF FAME INDUCTEES

The 2020 Hall of Fame class members will be honored August 3 at the Hall of Fame's annual induction ceremony in Elkhart, Indiana. The 10 individuals chosen for this year's class demonstrate what devotion to an industry looks like.

By RV News Staff

To be inducted into the Hall of Fame is to achieve the highest honor the manufactured housing and RV industries have to offer. The accomplished individuals dedicated themselves and decades of their lives to the betterment of their respective industries.

Exploring the lives and careers of the men and women whose photos line the walls at the RV/MH Hall of Fame can be humbling. The 10 inductees will join their peers as the "best of the best" encapsulating history.

In addition to working for a minimum of a quarter century in the applicable industry, nominees must go far beyond merely being good at their jobs. Criteria includes monumental service and contributions to each respective industry in ways unrelated to the day-to-day work of a career.

Inductees of 2020 served on association boards, worked at the state/national level on legislative affairs, helped organize industry events, created safety standards, invented new technologies and much more.

Quantifying excellence is a nearly impossible task. Excellence comes in many forms and current Hall of Fame members represent the spectrum of possibilities. Some excelled in engineering, design and building units. Others made their mark selling, marketing and managing RV/manufactured housing businesses. Still others excelled at repairing, teaching or creating safety and building standards. Each member took a unique pathway, but each arrived at the same destination: the RV/MH Hall of Fame.



Steven Adler

Current Company: Murex Properties

Other Companies: Champion Homes, Sun Communities, Forest Communities, Uniprop

Years in the Industry: 40

Notable Achievements:

- Served as chairman of the Manufactured Housing Institute (MHI) from 2015-2017.
- Currently serves on the board of directors of the Manufactured Housing Education Institute (MHEI).
- Founding member of MHI's National Communities Council.
- Served on the board of directors of the Florida Manufactured Housing Association (FMHA) and on its executive and membership committees.
- In 2015, received the MHI Chairman's Award and the FMHA's Williams-Olsen Award, its highest honor.
- Received Community of the Year Awards for his Lakeland, Florida and Apache Junction, Arizona properties.

The son of Sydney Adler, an industry pioneer and RV/MH Hall of Fame inductee in 1980, Steven Adler got his start in the industry in 1977 after earning a graduate degree in natural resource economics from the University of New Hampshire.

"I used to ride with my grandfather," Adler said, "making sales calls when I was five."

Adler played a key role in the creation and success of the Manufactured Housing Institute's Accredited Community Manager program. The accreditation program became a development tool to advance community managers' careers.

Adler was directly involved in developing the original program, which included a three-day seminar covering federal fair housing rules, marketing initiatives, sales techniques, leasing practices, budgeting, community maintenance and creating curb appeal.

As computerized, online curriculum and travel expenses became considerations for training, Adler and members of the MHEI resolved to bring the accreditation program into the 21st century.

Led by Adler, the committee developed updated curriculum for community managers and bundled it into an online coursework program. The program became the standard for manager training and development.

"The accreditation program still covers all aspects of community management, but since it's now online, you don't have to travel and be out-of-touch for three days," said Adler, currently president and CEO of Murex Properties, based in Fort Myers, Florida. Murex Properties owns/operates 16 manufactured housing communities in four states. All but one are age 55-plus retirement communities.

Careerwise, after working on a new housing development in Jupiter, Florida, Adler joined Uniprop, a private real estate investment firm, where he served as president.

"We grew to 40 properties in 12 states," he said, "with 15,000 sites."

Adler then worked for Walt Young, CEO of Champion Homes. The company was looking to expand vertically and was buying dozens of manufactured housing dealerships around the country. He was recruited to lead the company's further expansion into community development.

"At the time, Champion was buying dealerships as well as manufacturing, selling and financing homes. What they needed was a place to put all these new homes," Adler said. "That's where I came in."

The expansion involved a joint venture between Champion Homes and Sun Communities. Seventeen communities in eight states were developed. In 2002,



Champion Homes sold its interest to Sun Communities and Adler became the company's senior vice president.

In 2004, Adler left to found Murex Properties. With the backing of private equity investors and Green Courte Partners, he focused on the acquisition and operation of large retirement communities. In 2009, Green Courte Partners acquired American Land Lease, which required a portfolio realignment and would have meant a relocation for Adler. He declined overseeing the expansion, preferring to remain in Florida.

Murex Properties then quickly established a relationship with Northwestern Mutual Life and built a portfolio of active age 55-plus retirement communities in Arizona, Florida, Texas and Oregon.

Adler credits the success of Murex Properties to offering a variety of amenities for early retirees and older residents who prefer to "age in place."

"Affordable housing in the Sunbelt will always be sought after, but we want to provide more than that,"

Adler said. "We are always looking for ways to improve our amenities, keep expenses down and cater to their needs.

"We break our residents into three tiers, depending on where they are in retirement, whether they are active or simply want a restful, quiet place. Other communities view retirees as a single group. We recognize their different needs. From our community managers up to our senior executives, we are always looking to add services that improve quality of life."

Adler sees a bright future for the manufactured housing community business. Although availability of up-front capital and local zoning hurdles have made development of new age 55-plus communities very difficult, he said existing community expansions continue.

"The baby boomers are driving the retirement market and will be for many years," Adler said. "The value of a manufactured home in a retirement community, compared to other residential options, can't be minimized."



Mark Beecher

Current Company: Retired

Other Companies: Bank of the West, Deere & Company

Years in the Industry: 28

Notable Achievements:

- Developed an RV financing group at Deere & Company's John Deere Credit during a period when traditional loan sources were fleeing the RV industry.
- Developed the VIB loan program at Bank of the West, allowing dealers to approve RV loans in five minutes or less. The program was an unprecedented change in RV finance.
- Received the RVDA Chairman's Service Award in 2011.
- Received the RVIA National Service Award in 2015.
- Served on RVIA's Finance Committee from 1987 to 2014.
- Served as RVDA Finance Industry Liaison from 2008 to 2014.

Mark Beecher has been known for correcting salespeople who say, "nothing happens until somebody sells something." He would correct them with the added verbiage of, "nothing happens until somebody sells something and gets it financed."

Beecher worked to create "on-the-spot loan approvals," reducing the time dealers spent waiting for bank consumer financing approvals, which could take days to complete.

At Deere & Company in Waterloo, Iowa, Beecher worked in the inventory control department. His job involved acting as liaison between the systems and production teams.

Although it tends to be overshadowed by the recession of 2008, the economic slowdown of the early 1980s had a tremendous impact on the American economy.

Production of John Deere tractors in Waterloo fell from 200 to 60 units per day in just a year. Beecher said fields surrounding the factory were filled with repossessed tractors and other farm implements.

"It was at that time Deere started looking at offering RV dealer financing," Beecher said. "Deere had plenty of lending capacity and a heritage of supporting its customers. At the same time, RV dealers were clamoring for an alternative to banks with poor service and a history of leaving the market at the drop of a hat."

"'Financing brought to you by John Deere' became a tagline for the company's business strategy," Beecher said. "Within a

few years, Deere added a half-dozen private-label RV finance programs, plus its own program called Adventure Capital.

Beecher credits Coachman Industries founder Tom Corson, who recently passed away, for wisdom that helped guide his involvement with the RV industry. Corson, Beecher reflected, said, "Business goes where it's invited, but it stays where it's best served."

When Bank of the West decided to hold onto the portfolio of loans originated by Ganis Credit Corp. after the company was sold to the Bank of Boston, Beecher was at the top of the company's list to oversee management and growth of the portfolio. Bank of the West saw RV financing as a growth engine, but it needed someone to head up the business.

Beecher eventually agreed to take the job and quickly built a dynamic financing program for RV dealers.

He realized electronic access to credit bureau reports meant lenders could eliminate traditional credit application risk uncertainty. He believed RV dealers could approve their own loans using access to credit bureau reports. Beecher said lenders' initial response to his idea was compared to "letting the fox guard the henhouse."

Despite many initially being skeptical that RV dealers would sign up to pull their own credit bureau reports, the VIB finance program became an RV industry game-changer.

"Once we landed on some restrictions, like loan limits and loan-to-value ratios, the program really took off," Beecher



said. "When a dealer can send the customer on his way in a new RV, on the same day the customer walked through the door, it was a tremendous competitive advantage."

Beecher said the VIB name stuck, but what the letters stood for remained ambiguous.

"It meant what we wanted it to mean. For some, it's 'very important buyer.' For others it's a play on the Bank of the West's bear symbol. It also stands for, 'very important bear,' since this was such a slimmed-down loan process."

Ten years later, the VIB program earned its stripes at a time when lenders batted down, and dealer cash flows dwindled. For dealers, VIB financing made a big difference because it helped them through the tough economic times, he said.

From the bank's perspective, VIB financing improved efficiency and reduced costs. As a result, dealers were offered wholesale loan rates and other incentives to support backend programs like warranties and insurance.

RVDA President Phil Ingrassia said when times were tough, "Mark's leadership kept Bank of the West as one of the leading lenders in the RV space. He also helped educate dealers on how to survive and ultimately thrive in a new credit environment."

When he learned of his induction to the Hall of Fame, Beecher said he was surprised and honored. He said his only regret is his parents are not around to share it with him.

"My mom got sick just after my dad retired, so they were never able to realize their dream of travel and living in the outdoors," Beecher said. "My wife and I agreed that we wouldn't let that happen to us. We said we didn't want circumstances preventing us from doing what we lived our whole life wanting to do."

Today, Beecher enjoys retirement by traveling between homes in South Dakota and Arizona. He tours the country in an Itasca Ellipse that he and his wife purchased just days after retiring.



Garth Cane

Current Company: Retired

Other Companies: "RV Lifestyle" magazine

Years in the Industry: 48

Notable Achievements:

- Considered Canada's leading expert on current and past RV technology and RV owner issues.
- Served eight years as chairman of the Canadian Standards Association's Z-240 RV Technical Committee.
- Served 14 years as secretary for the board of directors of the RV Safety and Education Foundation (RVSEF).
- Created and led Canada's first RV technician apprenticeship program at Mohawk College in Hamilton, Ontario.
- Hosted a Canadian television series, "RV Vacation Adventures," from 1991 to 1995.
- Served 29 years on the Education Committee of the Ontario RV Dealers Association.

As a young school teacher, Garth W. Cane would travel across Canada during summer break with his wife. When she became opposed to further camping trips sleeping on the ground in a tent, they bought their first hard-wall trailer.

"My wife informed me that she was afraid of snakes, so that meant no more sleeping bags on the ground," Cane said. "That's when we bought our first RV, a Citation from General Coach."

As he became more active in the RV community, he joined the General Coach RV owner's club and was asked to host seminars at RV shows on a variety of topics.

"At that time, there was not a lot of information available for RV owners," Cane said. "And with my background as a teacher, the seminars were popular attractions at the RV shows."

With retirement from school teaching on the horizon, Cane decided to go back to school and earn an engineering degree. During a stretch as a sales and service consultant at Hogan Leisure Industries, he became interested in developing a training program specifically for RV technicians, something that did not exist in Canada at the time.

Cane's interest in technician training resulted in a place on the faculty at Mohawk College in Hamilton, Ontario. While there, he developed the curriculum for an RV tech

training apprenticeship that won government funding. Over time, a lack of industry support and enrollments killed the program, but Cane's reputation as a leading authority on all things RV in Canada was set in stone.

Cane's reputation as a source of technical information and owner issues brought him to the attention of "RV Lifestyle" magazine. He has written monthly columns for the publication spanning 34 years.

According to Norm Rosen, editorial director of "RV Lifestyle," Cane is "without question, our senior tech expert."

"Garth is one of the few journalists in the RV industry with a fan base that transcends the French and English Canadian RV audience," Rosen said. "His columns are translated into French for our "Vie en Plein Air" magazine and are among the best-read articles in each issue."

Cane said his work on RV standards is among his greatest career achievements.

Since 2004, Cane served as a volunteer member of committees hosted by the CSA Group (formerly Canadian Standards Association).

As committee chair of the Electrical Section of the RV Technical Committee known as Z-240, Cane implemented a number of standards that normalized RV construction, appliance and materials standards between Canada and the U.S.



"We look at everything from propane line-junction standards for RVs made in the States to wiring standards for appliances made in Europe," Cane said. "Refitting an RV to comply with our standards is time consuming and expensive."

For example, the Z-240 committee recently recommended revising a standard that would allow RV manufacturers to use either Canadian NMD wire or U.S.-spec NM-B wire. A second recommendation would amend the standard to allow the sale/operation of travel trailers up to 43 feet in length in Canada, two feet longer than the current standard.

The Z-240 committee works with regulators, manufacturers and technical experts to keep RV standards up-to-date and to resolve international standard differences, while also protecting RV consumers from defects and shoddy workmanship.

"We are making good progress," Cane said, "and I'm proud of what we have done on Z-240 in the past few years."

RV consumer education is still a priority for Cane. As the amount of new technology in modern RVs increases, owners find themselves unable to take advantage of the benefits the new tech provides. Cane continues to work to assist with this through his work at RVSEF.

"People get confused with all the bells and whistles on a modern RV," Cane said. "Manufacturers say customers want and need these new features and controls, but once they get their RV home, they don't use them, or they forget how they operate. It is important for the industry to talk with customers about how things work and the important safety features."

"Being selected to join the RV Hall of Fame tells me that what I have been doing is the right stuff, and that people appreciate it," he said. "It tells me I've made a difference."



Jeff Pastore

Current Company: Hartville RV Center

Years in the Industry: 47

Notable Achievements:

- Served as chairman of the Mike Molino RV Learning Center from 2011 to present.
- Between 2001 and 2009, served on the RVDA board of directors and held several officer roles including chairman.
- Served on RVDA committees for the Annual Convention (1996-2002), the RVIA/RVDA Committee on Excellence (2005) and RVIA/RVDA's Replacement Parts Availability Task Force (2007).
- Currently serves on the RVDA Board of Delegates.
- Elected to the RVDA Education Foundation in 2003 and in 2011 as chairman.
- From 2008 to present, has served on the Governing Board of the RVDA Technician Certification Committee.
- Helped create the Go RVing Coalition in 2006.
- Served as president of the Great Lakes RV Association during the 1990s.
- Received RVDA's James B. Summers Award, its highest honor, in 2010.

For someone who had no interest in following his family into the RV business, Jeff Pastore has become one of the industry's leading influencers and advocates according to Mick Ferke of Greenway RV Sales & Service.

"When I started college in 1980, I truly had no intention of going into the family business," said Pastore, currently vice president and general manager of Hartville RV Center, Hartville, Ohio.

While Pastore was attending college at nearby Kent State University, his father fell ill and asked that he help run the business "for a little while."

It was during that little while that Pastore fell in love with the RV industry.

"That time really opened my eyes," he said. "By the time I graduated college, I could not visualize doing anything but working in the RV business."

Jeff's parents, John and Nancy Pastore, founded Hartville RV Center in 1971 and by the time he came on board full-time in the mid-1980s, it had grown into one of the most successful dealerships in northeast Ohio.

By the early 1990s, Pastore had earned a reputation as a sharp, customer-focused businessman and was asked to serve on the board of the Great Lakes RV Association.

He helped lead that trade group through a period of remarkable growth.

In 1995, Pastore answered a call from Mike Molino, then president of the RVDA, to see if he would be interested in helping plan the annual dealer convention as the committee chairman.

"I must be a slow learner because most convention committee chairs serve one term; I served three," Pastore said.

A few years later, Pastore was again asked to support his fellow RV dealers as chairman of an ad hoc Finance and Audit Committee, in response to new federal legislation that revised industry accounting rules. Recognizing Pastore's leadership skills, the RVDA then tapped Pastore to serve on its board of directors. He was eventually elected as chairman.

Pastore recalls that as 1st vice chairman in 2007, he was attending a board meeting in Chicago when a representative of one of the banks that worked closely with RV dealers made an off-hand reference to possible loan problems in the banking industry.

"Remember, at that time the economy was red hot," Pastore said. "Customers were lining up and you could probably sell a trailer with three wheels."



The "dark clouds on the horizon" advice from the banker was enough for Pastore to convene a special meeting of the RVDA Board of Delegates, advising dealers to consider lowering inventories. As a result, while nearly everyone was blindsided by the depth of the 2008 recession, many RV dealers heeded the advice, lessening the financial blow.

As the economy stabilized, Pastore and others on the RVDA board recognized the lending landscape had changed. With most of the traditional RV lenders gone, many dealers needed new connections with different banks.

"We put together education programs for dealers to strengthen their understanding of the finance and accounting side of the business, and we produced materials for dealers to take to their new banks to teach them about our business," Pastore said. "It was a 'start from square one' approach."

Finishing terms as chairman and past chairman, Pastore stepped back in 2009 to refocus efforts on helping run Hartville RV Center.

It was not long before he was again tapped to lead another program for fellow RV dealers.

Pastore was named chairman of the RVDA Education Foundation in 2011 and the Mike Molino RV Learning Center.

"Even though the RV industry is a big business, in many ways it's still like a small business. Everybody knows everybody and you care about the people you are doing business with," he said. "Our interests are for the mutual benefit of everyone, even our competitors."

Karin Van Duyse, chief of the RV Learning Center, said, "Jeff's dedication to the industry and his advocacy for training and development is a most valuable asset for the entire RV industry."



Jerry Ruggirello

Current Company: AJR Development and AJR Home Sales

Other Companies: Infinity Homes

Years in the Industry: 35

Notable Achievements:

- Served on the board of directors and as an officer for the Michigan Manufactured Housing Association (MMHA) from 1998 to 2002, and again from 2004 to 2008.
- Served as chairman of the MMHA's Legislative Committee in 1999.
- Testified as an industry advocate before the Michigan House Economic Development Committee on manufactured housing community taxation and zoning rights issues.

Jerry Ruggirello is recognized as a leading political advocate for manufactured housing communities, not only in Michigan, but around the country.

"There is no person I have known, in my 42 years in this industry, who is more deserving a place in our honored Hall of Fame," said Bill Sheffer, executive director of the Michigan MH/RV and Campground Association.

Ruggirello said he has never been good at visualizing something from a blueprint or drawing. But show him a picture and he gets it right away.

Ruggirello said he's met plenty of people who process information similarly during his nearly four decades developing and operating manufactured home communities. That's a big reason he came up with the idea of adding manufactured homes to an annual residential home improvement show in suburban Detroit.

Adding the homes to the show has exposed more than 20,000 consumers each year to manufactured housing industry offerings.

"I see it all the time," Ruggirello said. "Once they see our homes in person, the first thing they say is 'Wow!'"

"We can do all the TV and radio advertising we want, but when people walk into a sales center, or at the Novi show, they are amazed at what they see," Ruggirello said. "From the spacious living areas to the modern kitchens...

It was true when I was getting started in the 1980s, and it's true today," he said. "People appreciate the value and the community lifestyle of our developments."

Donald Westphal, owner of a landscape architecture firm said, "Jerry's passionate defense of the industry, tireless commitment to fundraising for the state PAC and success of the Novi Home Showcase are a tremendous factor in the manufactured housing industry's success."

Jerry and his brother, Antonio (Tony) Ruggirello, own two companies in southeast Michigan that operate and sell units at six manufactured housing communities.

During the last 35 years, they kept the same mission their family predecessors set out with in the 1960s: stay local, maintain the highest quality standards and always remain involved in the communities.

As a high schooler, Ruggirello would round up football teammates from school and do maintenance work in his parent's manufactured housing communities. Working on the properties was how both Ruggirello brothers initially learned the business.

Jerry Ruggirello went to bat for the company in matters of zoning and permitting. When the economy slowed in 2001, he recognized that manufactured housing retailers, both big and small, were finding it difficult to finance their customers.

- Served on the joint Executive Board of MMHA and Michigan Association of RV and Campgrounds.
- From 2000 to present, served as president of the MMHA's PAC, recognized as one of the most successful trade association political action committees in the country.
- Named as a trustee to the Tim DeWitt Harvest Education Foundation, a nonprofit that provides scholarships to students interested in pursuing a career in the MH/RV/Self-storage industries.
- Appointed to chair the Michigan Manufactured Home Commission by Gov. Jennifer Granholm in 2010 and again in 2013 by Gov. Rick Snyder.

"There was nothing more frustrating than having people come and want to buy a home," Ruggirello said, "but they couldn't get financing. There was nothing we could do for them."

Over the next four years, the brothers earned licenses in loan financing and real estate sales, forming AJR Home Sales to address the financing problem.

As the second generation to run the business, Ruggirello grew AJR Development from 800 to more than 3,000 sites, building each community from the ground up on undeveloped land. 

