

PAINT & DECORATING RETAILER

Published by the Paint & Decorating Retailers Association

Success in Sun and Storms

How a Bahamian Retailer
Keeps Business Booming 44





Photos by Keen i Media

By Melanie Moul

All Is Fair in Paint and Retail

Training and Service Help Sustain Paint Fair's Legacy

Hurricane Frances ripped through the Bahamas in September 2004, causing about \$100 million in damage across the islands. For the residents of Freeport, Grand Bahama, including Lesley Davies-Baptista and her family, the storm served as a turning point.

"In May 2004, we opened a new store location, which my mum had built from the ground up," Davies-Baptista says. "It was a huge accomplishment, considering what the previous 10 years had been like in the economy here. And then in September, we had Frances."

Davies-Baptista and her family knew that the area where they lived was a flood zone, so they had left their personal and business vehicles at their store, Paint Fair, while they weathered the storm. After the storm passed, they returned to find four feet of water in their brand new showroom.

"Water finds the lowest level, and apparently, here at this store, we're it," she says. "It was as close as it gets to total devastation. We were all at a loss."

In addition to the damage at the business, the family was also grappling with the loss of the vehicles and damage to their homes.

"Where do you even start? With the help of staff and friends, we just started cleaning," Davies-Baptista says. "Everyone mobilized in such a wonderful way. Within weeks, with a generator, with doors open and with so many extension cords, we were operational."

While everyone was busy cleaning the store, Davies-Baptista's mother worked with the vendors to reorder all of the inventory and equipment to replace what had been destroyed.

Following the hurricane, Davies-Baptista and her family made modifications to the building and developed a process so they are prepared when the next storm warning comes through.

"Every time we have a hurricane warning, we put everything up two feet," she says. "We've gotten it down pat, and it's just tremendous to me the way the staff works together. They basically pack up a whole store as a hurricane comes."

Making a Comeback

When Hurricane Frances hit, Davies-Baptista was working in marketing outside the paint business her parents had started nearly 25 years prior.

“My father worked as a general contractor, and he had a hard time finding tinted paint on the island,” she says. “My parents opened Paint Fair in April 1980 because they recognized the need in the Bahamas.”

As many children whose parents run businesses do, Davies-Baptista helped out in the store as a child.

“I would help my mum tally up invoices—it was all done by hand,” she says. “I can still remember some of the numbers of Antique White because that color was the majority of our sales.”

Davies-Baptista says it wasn’t until later, when she was working in the business, that she truly appreciated the legacy her parents, Colin and Joan Davies, created with Paint Fair.

“Business was tough for them in the 1980s and 1990s. It was a tough economy,” she says. “It took the Paint Fair team working really hard to make it through, and it’s extraordinary to me looking back that they stuck with it. We are so grateful for where Paint Fair is today, and it is thanks to such a group effort.”

Davies-Baptista says one of the reasons the company survived and is flourishing today is because of her parents’ commitment to customers. Some of the original customers from when the store opened in 1980 still frequent the business today.

“My parents conducted business with tremendous integrity, and they made the customers feel like they were family,” Davies-Baptista says. “The business weathered and adapted, and it ultimately grew, despite the fact that the economy in Grand Bahama has continued to see challenges.”

Colin returned to contracting in the 1990s, and Joan took over running the business. She can still be found in the store today, monitoring inventory and finances.

Davies-Baptista’s husband Eric joined the family business full time in 2005 to help Joan with the day-to-day operations. A year later, Davies-Baptista came on board.

“My mum wanted to retire, and she looked to Eric and me to continue the family business,” she says. “She helped my husband become NACE-certified, and the timing felt right for me to get involved.”

Around that time, Joan helped diversify the business by adding industrial paints and coatings, which the community needed.

“We knew getting into that business that it’s a lot more specialized,” Davies-Baptista says. “My mother appreciated that these products weren’t just something you put on your shelf and expect to sell. She just took a leap of faith and it has really ushered in a new era for us. Industrial now represents about 30 percent of our sales.”

Helping to Rebuild

With its broadened portfolio, Paint Fair now touches each sector of the paints and coatings market on the island, selling products to residential, commercial and industrial customers.

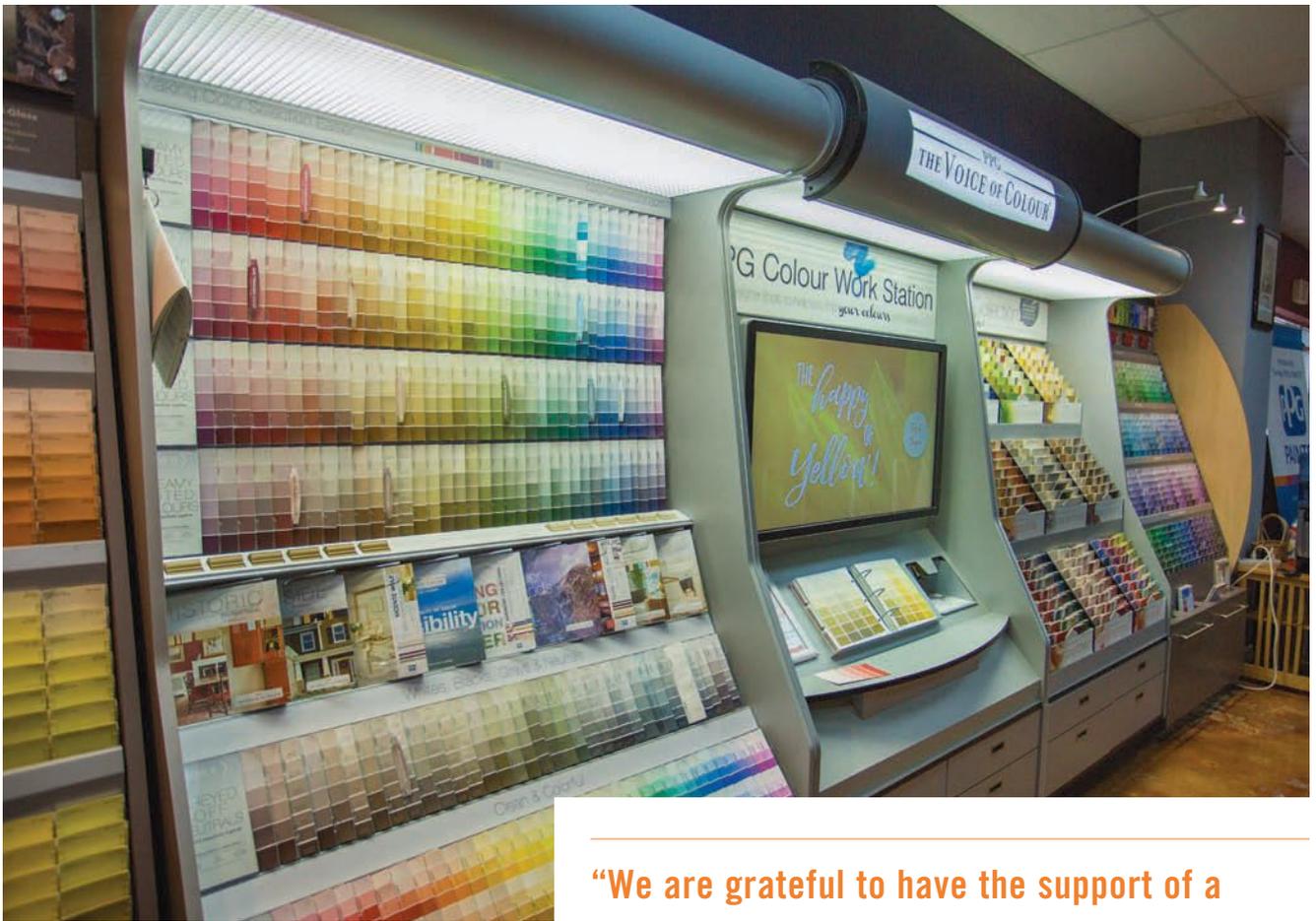
The recent spate of hurricanes in the Atlantic missed the island of Grand Bahama this season, but the island is still recovering from Hurricane Matthew that hit in early October 2016, during which 95 percent of the island’s structures endured significant damage.

“Over the last 12 months, most of our business has come from professionals and homeowners who are repairing the damage from Hurricane Matthew,” Davies-Baptista says. “A lot of the focus has been on repainting exteriors.”

Through the recovery process, Davies-Baptista says bold exterior color choices have been trending. Over the past decade or so, residents have been influenced by design television, like HGTV and the DIY Network, which has encouraged people to choose brighter colors.

Lesley Davies-Baptista owns and operates Paint Fair, the business her parents started in 1980 to fulfill a need in their community of Freeport, Grand Bahama.





The PPG Voice of Color display allows Paint Fair customers to coordinate paint colors with items they already own, which helps ensure seamless decor.

“Years ago, most of our invoices were for Antique White,” she says. “People are now recognizing that a little color can make a big difference. If you try an accent wall and you don’t love it, it’s just a coat of paint. Painting is really the easiest and most affordable way to change your space.”

To help ensure customers love their color choices the first time, the staff at Paint Fair does color consultations for consumer and professional customers in-store and on-site. The store also uses the PPG Voice of Color touchscreen display to help customers see their color options come to life on the digital screen.

The floor staff, led by Eric Baptista, also educates customers on the right kinds of products and finishes for their projects, which becomes a different conversation when considering future storms that will affect the island.

“With the hurricane damage and the impact from the elements, we’re seeing a better appreciation for 100 percent acrylics for the exterior,”

“We are grateful to have the support of a tremendous community here in Grand Bahama, which has trusted us with paint in the good times and hard times.”

—Lesley Davies-Baptista, owner, Paint Fair

Davies-Baptista says. “The paint holds up, and we’re getting traction on those products. It allows us to deliver a workhorse that people can get more life out of.”

Reaching Out

Davies-Baptista and the rest of the Paint Fair team understand how valuable customer relationships are to the business.

“We are grateful to have the support of a tremendous community here in Grand Bahama, which has trusted us with paint in the good times and hard times,” Davies-Baptista says. “That’s why we are in business. We thank God for their support—without it, we certainly wouldn’t be where we are today.”

Because of the team’s dedication to service and building relationships, Paint Fair has been able to grow its customer base in a challenging and competitive environment.