



Middle Market Spotlight 2021: Neil Kelly Co.

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This story is part of the Portland Business Journal's Middle Market 2021 coverage. Our full roster of stories has rolled out over the last week-plus: [Check here to find the latest Middle Market 2021 pieces.](#)

When Pacific Northwest residents faced a long shut-in period per the pandemic's arrival, many took stock of their homes.

And many more, in turn, weren't fans of what they saw.

"With the pandemic, people spent more time living and working at home — and they had a lot of time to think about how they could better use and enjoy their homes," said Tom Kelly, CEO of Neil Kelly Co. "That has led to a boom in the home remodeling industry."

Thus began a topsy-turvy year for Kelly's enterprise, the venerable Portland-based remodeling firm that's recently expanded its footprint into Seattle. The company has long been a middle-market



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Tom Kelly said his company strived to keep trades specialists working during the pandemic. The move paid off as Neil Kelly Co. chalked up its best year ever.

success story, tapping into the region's desire for combining sustainable construction with sleek design.

As for the last 12 months, "The last year has been a roller coaster, filled with some of the lowest lows and highest highs that I've seen in my 41 years as CEO," said Tom Kelly. "We're now on track to have the best year in our company's 74-year history."

To wit, before Covid, Neil Kelly employed 152 workers. It now employs 175, and, as of last week, counted 25 openings across all of its markets.

The rise clearly didn't come easily.

"At the beginning of 2020, our remodeling, solar and handyman divisions were going strong," Kelly recalled. "Then Covid hit, and everything plummeted quickly. We had to lay off 20 employees. That was really the bottom. We were eligible for PPP funds, and immediately brought back almost all of the people we had to lay off. We spent some of those slower months investing in employee training, and even created a 'Neil Kelly University' where people could get paid to learn new technology such as how to do project design remotely."

Along the way, the Neil Kelly team picked up several nuances regarding working through calamitous times..

"Before last year, I was really jaded and didn't think employees could successfully work from home," Tom Kelly offers. "But offering people flexibility, in terms of where and how they serve clients, is delivering a lot of benefits. Whether in the office or at home, we're finding creative ways to collaborate and manage projects."

Over the coming year, Neil Kelly will focus on solar offerings for both homeowners and business operators.

"The combination of credits, incentives and the decreasing cost of solar panels, is driving a lot of pent-up demand," he said. "I recently added solar to my floating home, and received my first \$10 energy bill. It was also gratifying to know I was doing my own small part to combat global warming."

Estimated 2021 revenue

\$28.1M

Year founded

1947

Employees overall

175

Employees hired since the pandemic

25

Employees laid off, then rehired as the pandemic continued:

20

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