

Longtime resident brought on to manage grand opening of latest Harbor Freight Tools store

November 3, 2020



In 2006, Michael Ekkart was hired on as a regular flooring associate when Home Depot debuted in Crescent City after replacing the old Kmart building.

Ekkart would work his way up to assistant manager before moving across Northcrest Drive to turn around the Dollar Store as its manager in 2014.

Now, two doors down, Ekkart cut the ribbon Oct. 31 officially opening the latest addition to Crescent City's community, Harbor Freight Tools, the 115th in California.

Ekkart said his experience leaned more toward clothes rather than crowbars.

"I'm coming from a different type of store than what I'm used to. I used to work for Macy's, Old Navy and other department stores," Ekkart said. "But this is the best of all worlds."

The 16,000 square foot Harbor Freight Tools is stocked with hand and power tools, with equipment for automotive repair to generators. Ekkart said the key difference between Harbor Freight and other home improvement stores is his company cuts out the middle man, dealing directly with the manufacturers which cuts their costs and transfers the savings directly to the customer.

Joining the grand opening were members of both the Northern Knights and Curry County Cruisers car clubs.

Tom Lee of the Curry County Cruisers said it's always fun to have an excuse to get their members out.

"It's nice to have a Harbor Freight. It has a lot of variety. Most of the stuff they have is very good and very reasonable," he said. "But it's just fun to come into a tool store."

Crescent City Mayor Blake Inscore said this was an exciting development for the community.

"We should all be thankful," Inscore said over the occasional rumbling engine of a hotrod. "Anytime we can do business, we're talking new jobs. And this year, as crazy as it has been, we're actually seeing things move forward. It's a good thing for all of us."

Roger Gitlin, District 1 Supervisor, touted the creation of 35 new jobs at Harbor Freight Tools.

"This is a shining star in our community," Gitlin said.

Army veteran and Crescent City native, Joe Burrell, was hired as as logistics manager, or, as he said, the one who does all the heavy lifting for Ekkart.

"We're all locals here. We're home grown Crescent City, Del Norte people, we love our community, we love working for them," Burrell said. "A lot of us here are also do-it-yourselfers. So we can help a lot of people with their questions. And we learn from our customers as well, giving us information we didn't know. We all know a little about something, but together we can get that project done."

Jeremiah and Jill Coleman came down from Brookings, Oregon, to check out the new store and liked what they saw.

"I'll probably use it more," Jill said. "He's at work all the time."

Ekkart couldn't have been more happy with the turnout for the grand opening.

"I expected exactly this. This is phenomenal. The soft opening Friday we did over \$30,000 had over 600 people came in. I anticipate the same today," he said.

Harbor Freight Tools was founded in Southern California in 1977 when 17-year-old Eric Smidt transformed his father's small business into a successful mail order company.

Harbor Freight since has grown to more than 1,100 stores across the U.S. employing more than 21,000.

Ekkart said opening a store in Crescent City is all the more amazing as it occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic. Harbor Freight recently donated its entire stock of nitrile gloves, N-95 masks and face shields to

hospitals in every community served by a Harbor Freights Tools Store.

Harbor Freights also sponsors community programs such as its Schools Prize for Teaching Excellence and supports non-profit organizations that serve K-12 public education, first responders and veterans. For more information on the gift card donations program, go to harborfreightgivingback.org.

To learn more about Harbor Freight Tools, go to harborfreight.com or follow them on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube.