

GEORGIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY



GEORGIA BUSINESS HISTORY INITIATIVE

Sharing the Stories of the Businesses that Built Georgia







THE HOME DEPOT

A PROFILE IN GEORGIA'S BUSINESS HISTORY

As the largest home improvement retailer in the world, The Home Depot serves millions of customers who need everything from lumber and power tools to paint, appliances, plumbing supplies, and more. What started as a bold retail idea has grown into a global brand that influences how people maintain, repair, and upgrade their homes.

However, The Home Depot's success is not only about what it sells but also comes from how it serves people. By focusing on customer experience, investing in employees, and showing up for communities, The Home Depot has made home improvement approachable for the average person. In many ways, The Home Depot does not just sell materials for projects, it helps everyday people believe, "I can do this."

In Georgia's business history, The Home Depot stands out because it represents a modern kind of entrepreneurship: ambitious, national in scope, and rooted in the belief that company culture matters. The Home Depot grew because of what it sold, but its lasting success is found in how it approached customers, associates, and communities.



A Bold Idea Built from a Career Setback

The Home Depot was founded in 1978 by Bernie Marcus, Arthur M. Blank, Pat Farrah, and Ron Brill, with assistance in getting investors from financier Ken Langone. Marcus, Blank, and Brill had been fired from their previous executive jobs at Handy Dan Home Improvement Centers in California. Their next move was not a safe return to another corporate post. Instead, they decided to reinvent the hardware industry.



Top: The Home Depot's first store. Right: Bernie Marcus and Arthur M. Blank.

Their idea was straightforward but daring for its time: Create warehouse-style stores with lower prices, massive selection, and knowledgeable sales associates who could help shoppers, especially beginners, figure out how to complete projects themselves. This was a challenge to the traditional hardware store model, which often had limited inventory and fewer resources for people who were not already confident do-it-yourselfers. In starting The Home Depot, they created a one-stop shop for the do-it-yourself (DIY) customer.

In the late 1970s, many homeowners relied on professionals for repairs or upgrades because home projects felt complicated, expensive, or just simply intimidating. The Home Depot helped shift that mindset by combining affordability with education.



Photos of The Home Depot's first store.

In 1981, a character known as Homer D. Poe began appearing in The Home Depot's print advertising. Homer added a down-to-earth touch to ads in an era where it was common to use generic clip art to promote products. Homer signaled to customers that home improvement does not have to feel technical, exclusive, or overwhelming. That tone turned a massive store into a more welcoming space, and it aligned with The Home Depot's mission to empower people to make repairs and improve their own homes.

The Home Depot's advertising slogans helped communicate that mission in plain language. From "When you're at The Home Depot, you'll feel right at home," to "You can do it. We can help," and now, "How does get more done," these slogans were not just marketing lines, they were the company's purpose. They made the store a destination where one could go to solve problems and fulfill dreams.

Associates provided in-person demonstrations, known as How-to Clinics, to show customers how to do a variety of projects, like tiling a floor or hanging wallpaper. In *Built from Scratch*, Bernie Marcus wrote, "Our people were already instructing weekend warriors in an informal way. Putting on How-To Clinics became a way of formalizing the teaching and making it available to all of our customers and further cultivating their interest in do-it-yourself home improvement."

Today, through workshops and online project guides, do-it-yourselfers of all skill levels and interests can learn from the home improvement retailer. The Home Depot hosts a variety of online workshops for aspiring doers and professionals led by knowledgeable associates and industry experts.

Top: 1990 Home Depot Holiday Catalog. Middle and bottom: Home Depot store associates.





Since 1997, The Home Depot's Kids Workshops have created a hands-on learning experience that sparks creativity, promotes problem-solving, and encourages social interaction for the youngest generation of DIYers. Open to children ages 5-12, Kids Workshops are monthly in-store experiences that encourage skill-building.

The Home Depot has reinforced the DIY culture through popular media. Since 2003, The Home Depot has partnered with This Old House Ventures to deliver expert advice and inspiration to its loyal fanbase. "This Old House" is one of the longest-running home improvement shows in the United States. The show chronicles the complete transformation of several diamond-in-the-rough homes each season, while "Ask This Old House" travels to homeowners to complete a variety of DIY projects that appeal to all skill levels to teach an entire generation of home enthusiasts. This Old House Ventures delivers an award-winning television experience that is built from the trusted expert advice that connects with both the professional and DIY customer.

The Home Depot began focusing on the professional customer (Pro) in the mid-1980s, and the Pro business is a significant part of the company's success. By offering benefits like bulk purchasing, jobsite delivery, and a loyalty program, The Home Depot supplies the Pros' needs for projects of any size.

Top: An associate assists a participant in a Home Depot Kids Workshop. Bottom: A variety of professional equipment is available to rent at Home Depot stores.



“Put Customers and Associates First, and the Rest Will Take Care of Itself”

The Home Depot credits its success to a people-centered culture. From the beginning, the company emphasized that long-term growth does not come from chasing short-term sales, but from investing in customers, associates, and communities.

Two key frameworks represent how the company manifests that culture: the Values Wheel and the Inverted Pyramid.

The Values Wheel: Central to The Home Depot’s Success

The company’s founders put in place a set of eight core values centered on taking care of our people, providing excellent customer service, giving back to communities, and more. These values form the fabric of its unique culture. This culture sets the framework for all decision-making.

Here’s what those values mean:

Taking Care of Our People

The key to success is treating people well. This includes listening and responding to associates’ needs, providing career opportunities and benefits that support healthy, prosperous lives. Founders Bernie Marcus and Arthur Blank said, “If we take care of the associate, they’ll take care of the customer, and everything else will take care of itself.”



An associate assists a customer.



Excellent Customer Service

Along with quality products, price, and selection, excellent customer service means going the extra mile to give customers support and knowledgeable advice along their project journey.

Building Strong Relationships

Strong relationships are built on trust, honesty, and integrity. Strong relationships are built by listening and responding to the needs of customers, associates, communities, and vendors, and treating them as partners.

Entrepreneurial Spirit

All associates are empowered to come up with innovative ways to serve customers and share ideas that help solve problems and improve business.

Respect for All People

To remain successful, associates must work in an environment of mutual respect, free of discrimination and harassment, where each associate is regarded as part of The Home Depot team.

Creating Shareholder Value

The investors who provide the capital for The Home Depot to grow deserve a return on their investment.

Doing the Right Thing

Associates exercise good judgment by “doing the right thing” instead of just “doing things right.” This means striving to understand the impact of decisions and taking responsibility for actions.

Giving Back

An important part of the fabric of The Home Depot is giving time, talents, energy, and resources to our communities.

Taken together, the Values Wheel forms a clean message: business works best when people feel supported, respected, and trusted to solve problems. For The Home Depot, culture is not decoration, it is about people - taking care of each other, coaching each other to excellence, and exceeding expectations.



Members of Team Depot, The Home Depot's volunteer force, at work on a project.

The Inverted Pyramid: Leadership as Support, Not Status

The Home Depot practices a different organizational structure than most companies. The CEO and upper management sit at the bottom of the pyramid, while front-line associates sit at the top. All company roles are responsible for supporting the success of the associates who directly serve customers.

Beginning in 2024, The Home Depot reinforced these values by requiring all corporate associates, from senior executives to remote staff, to work one eight-hour shift in a retail store every fiscal quarter. The purpose is to bridge the gap between corporate support roles and store operations, helping corporate associates better understand the day-to-day realities of working in our stores. It is a practical way to keep decision-making connected to real conditions: customer needs, store challenges, staffing demands, and the daily pace of retail work.



A Home Depot lumber associate.

The Home Depot Foundation: How The Home Depot Gives Back

The Home Depot's culture of giving back is exemplified by The Home Depot Foundation and its associate support program, The Homer Fund.

Supporting Veterans Through The Home Depot Foundation

The Home Depot Foundation, a nonprofit supported by The Home Depot and its vendors and partners, was created in 2002 following the attacks of September 11 and The Home Depot's support of the cleanup process. Since inception, The Home Depot Foundation has surpassed \$1 billion in philanthropic giving.

In 2011, The Home Depot Foundation began focusing on veteran-related causes and has invested more than \$650 million to help improve over 70,000 veteran homes and facilities, with a pledge to invest \$750 million by 2030. The Foundation and its partners serve veterans and their families by helping them access safe housing that meets their individual needs. Programs focus on providing critical home repairs, smart homes for combat-wounded heroes, and supportive housing programs for formerly homeless veterans.

Disaster Response and Recovery

When a natural disaster such as a tornado, flood, or wildfire strikes, The Home Depot Foundation works with its nonprofit partners to help communities from preparation and initial clean-up to rebuilding and repairing homes.

In 2025, for example, The Home Depot Foundation committed nearly \$9 million to support communities impacted by natural disasters. The Foundation and Team Depot, The Home Depot's associate volunteer force, also assemble and supply disaster "clean-up kits" full of essential items to help families begin the road to recovery. Team Depot has assembled more than 56,000 kits to be distributed in communities around the country.

But the Foundation doesn't leave once supplies have been distributed. Alongside its partners, the Foundation supports rebuilding efforts.



Top: Team Depot volunteers assist with home renovations for a veteran family.
Bottom: Team Depot volunteers help with storm cleanup.

Participants in The Home Depot Path to Pro Skills Program learn valuable skills for in-demand trades.



Path to Pro Skilled Trades Training and Jobs Marketplace

There are over 300,000 open roles in the skilled construction trades, such as carpentry, plumbing, electrical, and HVAC today, expected to grow to 4.1 million by 2031 as demand continues to outpace the available workforce. To help solve this, The Home Depot Foundation launched Path to Pro in 2018 with a \$50 million commitment to introduce more people to careers in the trades. In 2021, the company followed with additional business-side investments in Path to Pro.

The Home Depot's Path to Pro program helps people get started by making it easier to learn and find work. It offers a free, self-paced online training program where beginners can learn basic skills and build a strong foundation. It also includes the Path to Pro Network, a free online marketplace that connects trained candidates with Home Depot's professional contractors who are looking to hire. Together, these tools help create a clear path from learning new skills to starting a career.

Through The Home Depot Foundation, Path to Pro focuses on providing hands-on training certifications and financial support to help people succeed in the skilled trades. Partner schools, nonprofit organizations, and community partners make free training accessible.

This support includes scholarships to help cover the cost of education and training programs, as well as hands-on learning opportunities for people of all ages, including youth, adults changing careers, and those separating from the military. In 2026, the Foundation also launched a national Education Grants program to help schools, colleges, and nonprofits revitalize their "shop" classrooms with updated tools, equipment, and materials.

Since it began, The Foundation's Path to Pro programs have introduced more than 600,000 people to careers in the skilled trades, helped certify over 70,000 participants, and awarded nearly 1,000 scholarships, on top of the hundreds of thousands impacted by the business-side programs.



Team Depot Volunteerism

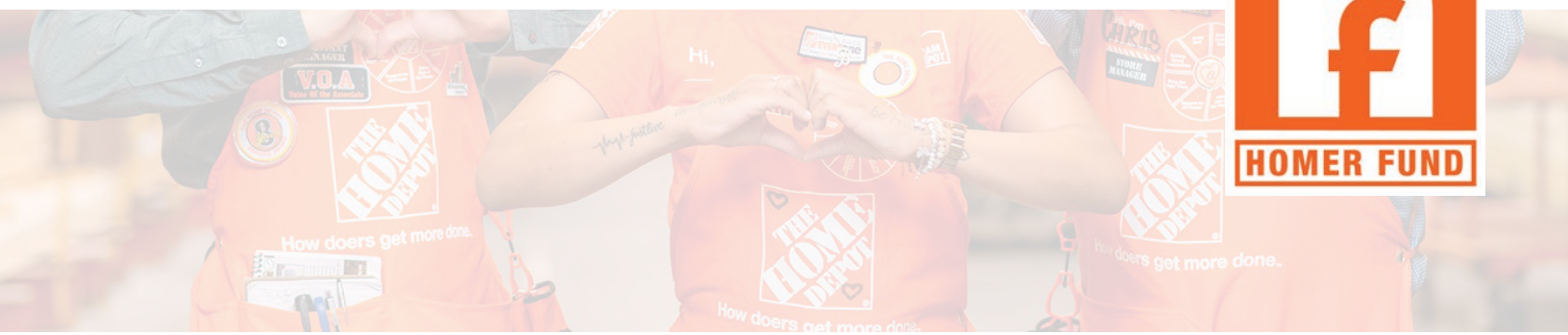
For over 30 years, Team Depot, The Home Depot's associate volunteer force, has been supporting and giving back through volunteer projects. Each store's Community Captain organizes projects, and associates provide off-clock sweat equity to support their local community. Since 2011, Team Depot has worked side-by-side with nearly 15,000 nonprofit organizations and completes an average of six projects a day in their communities, with over 60% of projects focused on veterans.

Team Depot projects range from helping disaster-impacted areas clean up and recover after hurricanes, floods, and other storms to building wheelchair ramps or completing landscaping projects for senior, disabled or low-income veterans.

Supporting Associates During Hard Times

The Homer Fund

The Homer Fund is a nonprofit that supports The Home Depot associates facing unexpected hardships, such as medical emergencies, disasters, or family crises. Since 1999, the program has awarded more than 200,000 grants, totaling nearly \$300 million. It reflects a deeper commitment: associates are not just workers; they are people with lives that sometimes get messy, expensive, and unpredictable. The Homer Fund is a perfect example of how The Home Depot lives its value of Taking Care of Our Associates.



Where Does It Lead?

Massive Success

The Home Depot's investment in associates, customers, and communities has translated into significant and ongoing business success. The company operates more than 2,300 retail stores across the United States, Canada, and Mexico. In 2025, it generated approximately \$164.7 billion in revenue and employed over 470,000 associates.

The Home Depot revolutionized the home improvement retail industry, shaped popular culture around DIY, and built an identity around supporting customers and associates. While customer shopping habits have changed, and products and technology have advanced over the years, The Home Depot has evolved and grown to meet their needs. The values and culture remain the same as the day the company was founded. Its Values Wheel and Inverted Pyramid show how it aligns decision-making with human needs. Its community programs—from veteran support to volunteer programs—reflect a company that understands that business success and public trust can reinforce each other. And through Path to Pro, The Home Depot is investing in the workforce that will keep communities functioning in the decades ahead.

In the end, The Home Depot's story highlights a bigger lesson: companies do not last simply because they sell things people need. They last because they build relationships, invest in people, and create systems that help ordinary customers feel capable.

Answer the following questions to test your comprehension of the text.

1. Why is The Home Depot's success about more than just its products?
2. Why did sponsoring *This Old House* fit The Home Depot's mission? Use one detail from the text.
3. Name two ways The Home Depot "gives back" as described in the reading.

Home Depot associates.





CASE STUDY

Path to Pro: Scaling the Skilled Trades Pipeline

In 2026, The Home Depot Foundation launched the Path to Pro Education Grants initiative, aiming to fund schools, trade colleges and nonprofit skilled trades programs in all 50 states. These grants are only one piece of the larger Path to Pro program that began in 2018 as a \$50 million commitment and has evolved into a nationwide infrastructure for construction training and education, bringing back “shop class” and bridging the gap to high-demand careers.

This commitment sits alongside the company’s Path to Pro program, which offers free virtual on-demand training and the Path to Pro Network, where job seekers and employers alike can network for hire.

The stakes have never been higher. For every five plumbers and electricians who retire, only two come behind to replace them, impacting the nation’s infrastructure, housing stock, and affordability. Path to Pro ensures we keep investing in the workforce that will keep communities functioning for decades to come.

Top: Participants in a Path to Pro training program.

Impact: By the Numbers

Path to Pro has made a meaningful impact on closing the skilled labor gap in the United States:

The Foundation:

- **More than 700,000 individuals** introduced to the trades and **70,000+ participants** have been certified through the Foundation’s nonprofit partner initiatives and training programs.
- **2,500+ K–12 schools** now receive direct funding and curriculum support through the Foundation’s Path to Pro program.
- **More than 1,000 individuals** interested in pursuing an education in the skilled trades have been awarded scholarships by The Home Depot Foundation.

The Company:

- **Over 6.7 million people** have been introduced to the trades as a viable, high-tech career option.
- **200,000+ graduates** of Path to Pro’s Skills Program have completed training in specialized fields including electrical, sustainable HVAC, and general construction.
- **195,000+ jobseekers** have profiles within the Path to Pro Network, with the ability to connect with Pros hiring for jobs.

Meeting the Need

Path to Pro has expanded its scope and evolved its approach to meet the changing needs of a digital-first economy:

- **National Partnerships and Grants:** The Home Depot Foundation partnered with Boys & Girls Clubs of America, demonstrating the importance of catching talent early to help build a pipeline of skilled workers for the future. This strategy evolved with the national Education Grants initiative, providing \$10,000 to schools and organizations that need to update their tools and equipment for training.
- **The Path to Pro Network:** This is a proprietary platform that connects job seekers with The Home Depot's massive "Pro" customer base for immediate hiring.



Top: A Path to Pro student is given instruction on new equipment.

Building the Skilled Trades Pipeline

The Foundation and company programs impact both participants and industries in multiple ways:

- **Economic Mobility:** With free hands-on training and certification pathways alongside scholarships for post-secondary education, Path to Pro provides a path to financial stability, with skilled construction trades offering careers that are resilient, long-lasting and high-demand.
- **Infrastructure Resilience:** With more licensed plumbers and electricians in the pipeline, communities are better equipped to handle urban growth and to rebuild following a disaster.
- **Housing Affordability:** Research shows the current skilled construction labor gap could cost the residential housing industry \$10.8 billion, leading to soaring housing and construction costs. With a more robust pipeline of talent, contractors will be able to keep up with demand, which will in turn reduce the amount of time it takes to build a home and decreasing the overall cost to homeowners.
- **Local Business Support:** The Home Depot's professional customers (contractors and builders) now have a reliable source of labor to grow their own small businesses.

The Vision Realized: In 1979, The Home Depot taught a generation how to hold a hammer. Today both the company and its Foundation are teaching a new generation how to build a nation through Path to Pro.

Case Study:

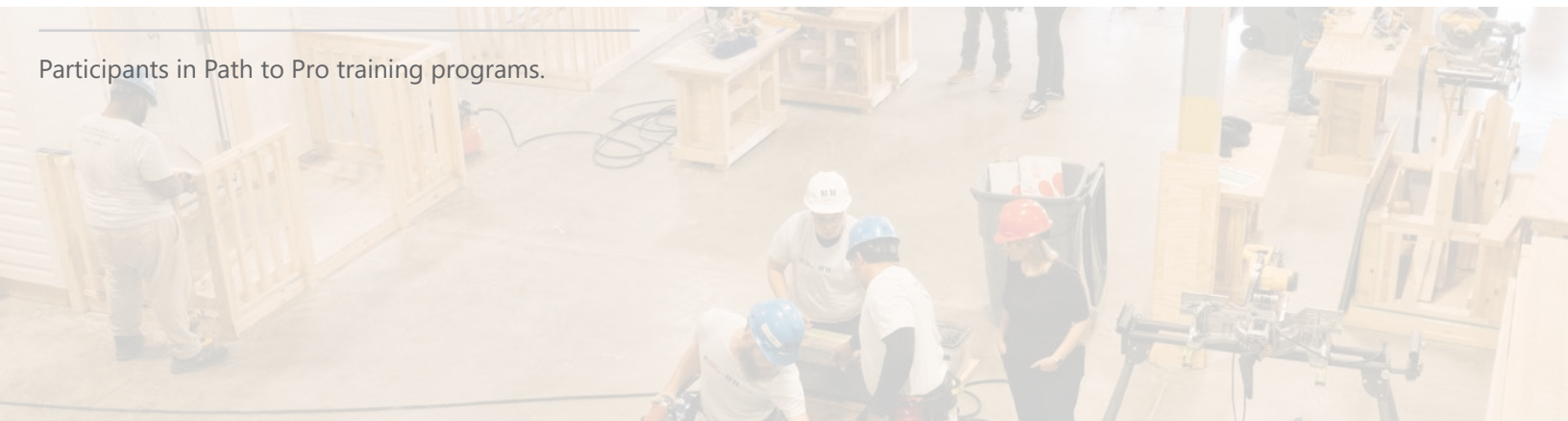
1. What is Path to Pro, and what problem is it trying to address?
2. What is expected to happen to the construction workforce by 2031, and why does that matter?
3. How does Path to Pro connect households to the broader economy? Give a real-world example (home repair, HVAC, electrical, plumbing, etc.).
4. If more people enter skilled trades because of Path to Pro, what might happen to: home repair costs, construction speed, and local business growth? Explain your thinking.

Reflection

1. If you were starting a new business in Georgia, which two ideas from The Home Depot would you copy to build customer trust and why?



Participants in Path to Pro training programs.



Vocabulary

Corporate Culture: the set of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterize an institution or organization

Home Improvement: being or related to a project to make one's house better, bigger, more modern, etc.

Stockholder Value: reflects a company's success in delivering financial gains to its equity owners, driven by strategic management decisions that optimize earnings, free cash flow, dividends, and share prices. (Definition from Investopedia)

Values Wheel: something (such as a principle or quality) intrinsically valuable or desirable

Workforce Gap: the discrepancy between the skills, capabilities, or headcount an organization currently has and those needed to meet its future business goals and operational demands

All definitions from Merriam-Webster online dictionary, unless otherwise noted.

Georgia Standards of Excellence

8th Grade:

(SS8E2) Evaluate the influence of Georgia-based businesses on the State's economic growth and development.

High School:

Fundamentals of Economic Decision-Making:

(SSEF1d) Apply the concept of opportunity cost (the forgone next best alternative) to personal choices, as well as business and government decisions.

(SSEF2) Give examples of how rational decision-making entails comparing the marginal benefits and the marginal costs of an action.

(SSEF2a) Explain that rational decisions occur when the marginal benefits of an action equal or exceed the marginal costs.

Microeconomics:

(SSEMI1) Describe how households and businesses are interdependent and interact through flows of goods, services, resources, and money.



The Georgia Historical Society is the premier independent statewide educational and research institution responsible for collecting, examining, and teaching Georgia and American history. Founded in 1839, the Georgia Historical Society is the oldest continuously operating historical society in the South and one of most prestigious in the nation.

Making the past relevant to the present is at the core of our mission. Through our award-winning public programs, publications, teacher training, and research services, we aim to use the power of our shared history to offer all Americans new and deeper perspectives on the past and present.

What We Believe

We believe in the value of history.

We believe that public knowledge of our past is fundamental to our future.

We believe our shared history is what binds us together as Americans.



Each year the Georgia Historical Society selects iconic companies in our state to be honored through the Georgia Business History Initiative.

By showcasing these companies, GHS seeks to teach Georgia students, citizens, and tourists alike about the pivotal role of Georgia's leading businesses in the economic, cultural, and social development of Georgia and the United States.

