

Mister Mixers' Second Act: Leading a Retirement Life of Purpose and Energy

When Jim Van Vranken, Ross Regional Sales Manager of over 40 years, retired in late 2010, he'd already earned plenty of victories. The last thing he might have thought was how much more successful he was about to become. But there it was: the passion for selling still burning in his bones. Before any retirement dust could settle, Jim officially opened his own company, Mister Mixers LLC, and started serving as an independent Ross Sales Representative covering Western Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Mississippi and Louisiana.



Jim lives on top of a mountain in West Virginia, not exactly a hotbed for specialty industrial mixing equipment. Yet, in 2018 alone, to date, Jim has won mixer orders totaling over \$ 2.4 million. Counting what's in the pipeline, this total is expected to exceed \$ 4 million before the year is over.

Make no mistake – Jim is as reliable and up to the task but he isn't putting in the same hours and miles as he did back when he was a full-time salaried employee. He enjoys the perks of retirement and sells mixers in his spare time. Indeed, it's no small feat that Jim figured out his own new rhythm for balancing family, business, hobbies, leisure and altruism.

In 2004, Jim's wife, Gail "Boatsie" Van Vranken, founded Boatsie's Boxes (www.boatsie.com), a non-profit charitable organization supporting US troops assigned overseas. Every week, all year long, Boatsie's Boxes ships care packages to hospitals and groups of young troops all over the Middle East, Asia, Europe, Africa and ships at sea. Jim is part of a crew of volunteers that collect, organize and pack whatever items are being requested – toiletries, books, magazines, games, snacks, OTC medicines, and many other simple conveniences that military men and women miss from home. In 2007, President Bush personally thanked Gail, along with other individuals, in a recognition ceremony at the White House. In his professional life, Jim is known as Mister Mixers or simply JVV. But outside that circle, he's Mr. Boatsie. (And if you're wondering about "Boatsie", it's the nickname Jim gave Gail because they met on a ferry boat, love at first sight and all.)

Jim (seated in middle) with company president Rich Ross (far right), circa 1970's.



As a Ross Regional Sales Manager, Jim was assigned to various regions around the US, from New Jersey to Washington State. He was a mentor to many Ross salespeople and a key player in the development of vacuum-capable mixers. Jim is arguably the biggest champion of vacuum mixing, as colleagues and customers can attest. He sold the very first Triple-Shaft Mixer, when competitors back then were offering only disperser and anchor agitator combinations. Smelling potential, Jim at one point actively rallied for the company to place greater focus on the food industry, a move that has led to tremendous growth in sales and still does.

A colorful mix of gusto, grit and generosity, Jim's character not only makes him a natural salesman but also a great friend. His body of work spanning more than four decades was legacy enough. Yet in his second act, Jim has given us even more to be inspired and hopeful about.

Retirement isn't about losing one's identity, energy, purpose, creativity or agency to contribute. It's the reward for a lifetime of hard work, offering not only free time but freedom to be successful on your own terms.