

# Drumm's Sawmill Prospers in Niche

*Lumber kiln from Kiln-Direct.com paying off for company in upstate NY*

By Tim Cox  
Contributing Author

SCHUYLERVILLE, New York – Barney Drumm is living proof that there is still room in the forest products industry for entrepreneurs and start-up businesses.

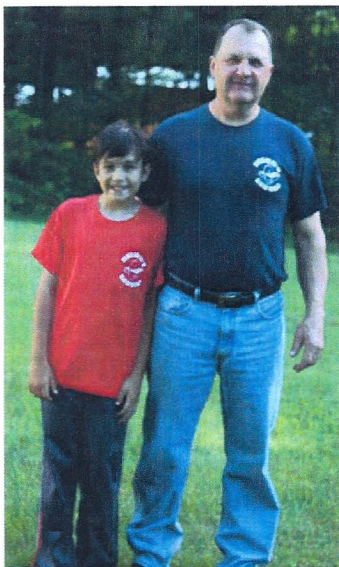
He operates Drumm's Sawmill in upstate New York, a small business that makes specialty softwood lumber products, like custom siding. A year ago he invested in a dry kiln from Kiln-Direct.com in order to have his own lumber drying capacity.

Drumm, 62, is somewhat of a newcomer to the sawmill business. He began his career as a dairy farmer. He sold the farm in 1985 and worked in construction for two years, then went to work at a GE chemical plant in Waterford as a machinist-mechanic in 1988. He continued to work for GE until he retired in 2010.

Drumm bought an old Lane hand-set mill in 2004 and moved it to a new location. He poured a concrete pad for the mill, set it up, and constructed a mill building around it. Since then he has completely refurbished the mill - among other things, replacing the wood frame that supported it with a steel frame.

He bought the mill with a Turner planer-matcher, which he recently replaced with a J.A. Vance planer-matcher. The machine can plane and cut both v-grooves and tongue and groove. The mill also is equipped with a Renco vertical two-saw edger. "Less steps, less men," said Drumm. The mill building is 50x120, and the planer mill is 30x200.

Drumm grew up in the Schuylerville



*Barney Drumm standing with his grandson Logan Drumm in front of woods that stand near Drumm's Sawmill. This picture illustrates the family connections that are so common in our industry.*



*Drumm's Sawmill building resembles the customer base the company serves. Barney Drumm sells production to contractors, individual homeowners, and farmers. Contractors he serves specialize in reclaiming old homes and barns, while others do new post-and-beam construction.*

area, which is just south of the Adirondack Mountains and about 35 miles north of Albany. The region's forests are predominately softwood timber.

Drumm, who helped his father cut timber as he was growing up, has had a strong interest in the sawmill business over the years due to his friendships with several people in the industry who have small businesses. They encouraged him to get into the industry.

Drumm makes specialty siding and lumber products for old Victorian homes in the region as well as ship lap siding, novelty siding, log cabin siding, v-groove and tongue and groove lumber, and components for old barns and post-and-beam style construction for new homes and barns. He also produces rough cut lumber.

Drumm's Sawmill cuts all white pine. "We have a lot of white pine here," observed Drumm.

He sells his production both to contractors and individual homeowners and farmers. Some of the contractors he does business with specialize in reclaiming old homes and barns while others do new post-and-beam construction. Rough cut lumber is sold mainly for outbuildings.

Drumm runs the business full-time and works in it himself. He normally runs the sawmill. He has one full-time employee, and two of his sons help him in the mill part-time. Drumm usually alternates between running the sawmill and the planer-matcher, although sometimes - with his employees - he operates both at the same time. He cuts about 3,500 board feet a day.

Before investing in a dry kiln from

North Carolina-based Kiln-Direct.com, Drumm contracted with other companies to dry some of his production, and some of it was air-dried.

One of the reasons he decided to invest in a dry kiln was because sales of rough cut lumber dropped off about two years ago, he said.

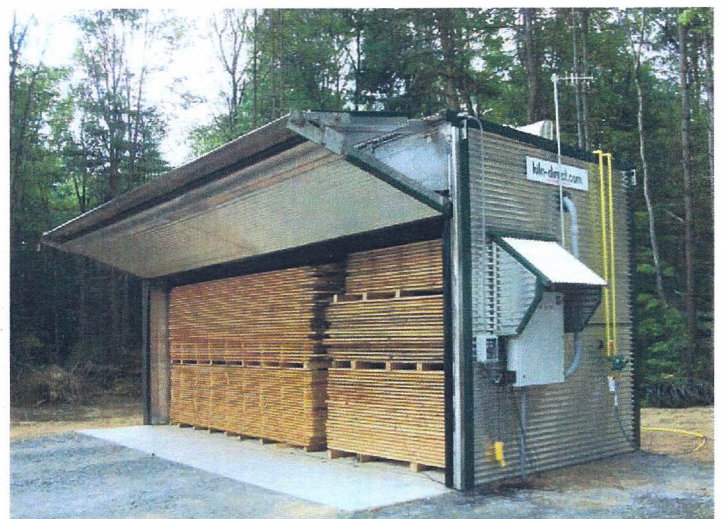
He had researched dry kilns for a few years, he said, and considered several suppliers. He researched kiln suppliers mainly by talking to other lumber businesses that had kilns and also by scrutinizing the websites of dry kiln suppliers. In the pro-

cess, he talked to a few people in Vermont and Connecticut who had purchased dry kilns from Kiln-Direct.com.

"They were very satisfied," he recalled. "It's turn of the century versus the rest of them," he said, referring to the lumber kiln's automated computer controls.

"I thought they were more efficient," he said of Kiln-Direct.com, offering kilns that would dry lumber at less cost.

Drumm conceded that he had some reservations about investing in a dry kiln. "Oh, sure," he said. The decision to invest in a dry kiln was, like some other business



*Drumm's Sawmill installed new Kiln-Direct kiln about twelve months ago. This small 9000 bd.ft. capacity Kiln-Direct kiln has an optional bi-fold door. This unit is small but has the latest computer control technology.*



**Barney Drumm at the helm of the 50 year old Lane mill, which has a five-knee carriage and is powered by a Cummins diesel engine. The mill runs a 52-inch Simonds carbide-tipped circular blade.**

decisions, a calculated risk, acknowledged Drumm. Taking money out of savings to purchase equipment for business when you're in your 60s, "Some people think you're nuts," he said.

"It has definitely helped my business," he said, and sales have increased 50 percent.

Drumm purchased a turn-key unit from Kiln-Direct.com, fully assembled. About the only thing he had to do was put down a concrete pad and run the electric service to the kiln. He uses propane for fuel.

The kiln is small, 12 feet by 28 feet. It was fully assembled at Kiln-Direct.com's facilities and delivered as one unit.

"Basically, it's a real industrial lumber kiln with the latest computer control technology that just happens to be small," explained Niels Jorgensen, president of Kiln-Direct.com. The model purchased by

Drumm has a capacity of 9,000 board feet.

"It's a very small niche market for people who have small kiln needs but who want everything that big industrial kilns offer," added Jorgensen. Companies that supply large industrial lumber kilns are not set up to offer small models to niche forest products businesses, he noted.

Drumm purchased the bi-fold door upgrade for easier access; the bi-fold door opens from the bottom to the top instead of moving left or right like a typical barn door opening. He also added additional heat capacity for a total of 600,000 BTU since he is drying softwoods.

The Kiln-Direct.com unit features all-aluminum construction inside and out. It is equipped with automated computer controls with an integrated wood moisture meter and a wireless communication connection to Drumm's office computer.

Drumm follows a conservative nine-

## Kiln-Direct.com Supplies Dry Kilns, Expertise

Kiln-Direct.com supplies small to mid-size lumber kilns with capacity ranging from 9,000 board feet to 40,000 board feet. It also supplies specialty kilns for drying firewood and to heat-treat pallets.

These turn-key lumber kilns come standard with heat recovery on vents, gas heating, and computerized controls. Hot water and steam heat are available. Controls can be upgraded to a dual control system using an integrated MC meter when in drying mode or internal wood temperature sensors in heat-treatment mode.

Kiln-Direct.com kilns feature all-aluminum construction inside and out; the units are assembled at the company's facilities near Wilmington, N.C.

The latest version of Kiln-Direct.com's Wooddryer System kiln management software also enables online assistance and training sessions with customers and remote technical assistance. The latest version of the software can operate a kiln as a standard lumber kiln or as a heat-treatment kiln for the pallet industry.

The company provides extensive free information about lumber drying on its website. The information ranges from lumber drying theory to kiln construction, troubleshooting, and upgrading.

Kiln-direct is committed to providing dry kiln equipment and controls to the forest products industry. It can provide high quality dry kiln equipment at the lowest possible price direct because it designs and manufactures all components specifically for dry kilns.

For more information, see the company's website at [www.kiln-direct.com](http://www.kiln-direct.com) or contact Niels Jorgensen by e-mail at [sales@kiln-direct.com](mailto:sales@kiln-direct.com) or phone at (910) 259-9794.

day schedule drying 1-inch material and 13 days for 2-inch. "Give or take a day," he added.

He described the dried lumber quality with one word: "Excellent."

"Not the first time you do it," he quickly added.

Drumm buys white pine logs from 10 inches to 24 inches in diameter and typically from 10 feet to 16 feet long, although for barn and post-and-beam components he buys logs up to 28 feet long. Logs are sorted in his wood yard.

Log markets are in good shape, he said. "We definitely have a good log supply," he said, and prices have been stable the past four years.

The Lane mill, which Drumm estimated at 50 years old, runs a 52-inch circular blade; Drumm uses Simonds carbide-tipped blades. It has a five-knee carriage and is powered by a Cummins diesel engine.

The sawmill has no debarker or automated material handling equipment. Much of the work is done by hand although Drumm has a John Deere loader to handle the logs and a John Deere forklift to move lumber.

The loader is used to putting logs on an in-feed deck. After squaring up the log and removing the slabs, Drumm begins removing boards, and then they are finished on the edger. He cuts 1x material from 1x4 to 1x12, but mainly 1x10, and he also cuts 2x4 to 2x12. The green lumber is stickered and stacked in the yard to be air-dried or may be stickered and loaded directly into the kiln.

Drumm has a Montgomery grinder to take care of residuals. After grinding his residual material, Drumm sells it to companies that make landscaping mulch. They re-grind it, in some cases color it, and sell it. He has a Caterpillar loader for moving residual material and grindings.

The company has a truck-trailer for local deliveries, and for longer distances he relies on trucking contractors.

Drumm said he is enjoying the work.

His wife, Shirley, does the bookkeeping.

The past four years have been tough on the forest products industry, Drumm acknowledged. He has been able to weather the storm of the recession and weak economy because he serves a specialty market.

Being a small business has been beneficial in another way, he said. "The problem with any business," he noted, is that when they get so big, customers cannot get the individual attention they want or deserve. "And, of course, you lose business doing that."

"Being hands-on, a little mill like this, you can divert a little more attention to your customer," he added.

Drumm markets his company by advertising and also has a website that has generated substantial business for him. His website was designed and is maintained by a Utah company that called him to solicit the business.

Drumm enjoys the outdoors – hunting, fishing, and riding a motorcycle. He has a son who lives in Alaska, and Drumm goes there once or twice a year to hunt and fish for salmon.

Although he is not active in any trade associations, Drumm is a member of the National Federation of Independent Businesses, the Saratoga County Chamber of Commerce, and a local Elks club.

He is still good friends with other sawmill owners who encouraged him to get into the industry, he said.

"The economy was doing a lot better than it is today," he said, when those friends encouraged him a few years ago to venture into the business. He has fared reasonably well because he diversified, he noted, while other sawmill operators did not.

Asked about what plans he may have for the future, Drumm said, "I'm probably going to keep doing what I'm doing for the next few years," until it becomes clear what the economy does. If the economy strengthens, he may expand in order to increase production, he said.

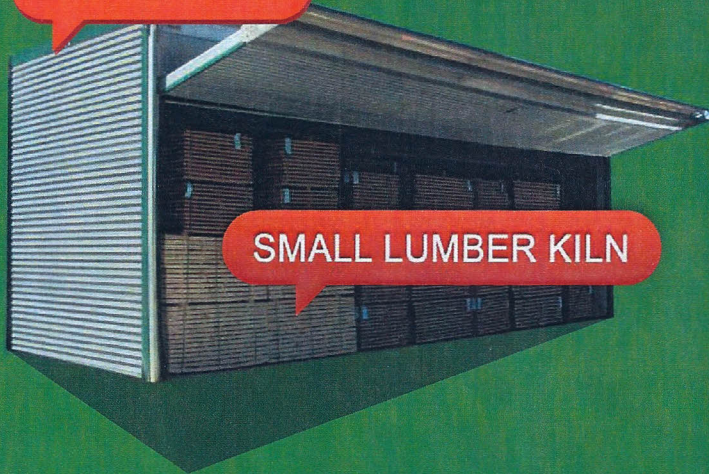


**The back side of Drumm's Kiln-Direct kiln illustrates power venting and a heat recovery system that is integrated into the wall, plus a control cabinet on the end. The kiln has computerized controls with an integrated moisture meter that is networked to the office computer for record keeping and kiln management software.**

# kiln-direct.com

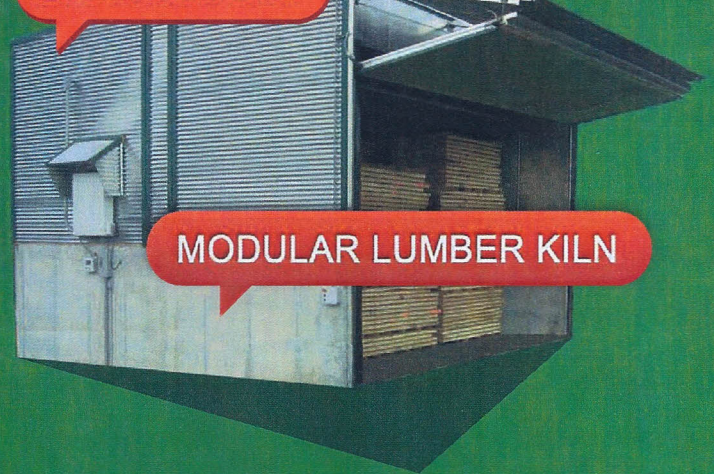
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