News Release

KNUDSEN, GARDNER & HOWE, INC.
P.O. Box 1043, Twinsburg, OH 44087 • T: 330.800.1732

CONTACT: *Tim Knudsen* • *tk@kghinc.com*

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE- SEPTEMBER 22, 2026

Mill-Rose's John Kirkland Honored with AIM/R's 2026 Golden Eagle Award

Glen Ellyn, Ill. – John Kirkland, National Sales Manager of The Mill-Rose Company's Clean-Fit Products division, was recently honored by the Association of Independent Manufacturers'/Representatives (AIMR) with the 2026 Golden Eagle Award during the association's 54th Annual Conference, held Sept. 14-17 in Napa, Calif. AIMR is a trade association dedicated to enhancing the quality and value of independent sales representative agencies serving the plumbing, HVACR, kitchen & bath, waterworks, and irrigation markets.

Each year, AIM/R members nominate a manufacturing leader who exemplifies the values of partnering with independent manufacturers' representatives to take products to market. Nominees are recognized for building strong relationships with their representatives, communicating effectively, backing their representatives operationally, and actively supporting the industry through AIM/R and other forums, hallmarks of prior honorees as well.

"I am truly honored to be the recipient of the Golden Eagle award," he said. "I sincerely thank everyone who made this recognition possible. I am grateful for the support, encouragement, and opportunities I have received from my family, friends, colleagues, and mentors. I share this recognition with everyone who has been a part of my journey."

Kirkland points first to Mill-Rose President Greg Miller for the trust to run the company's rep network on his own terms. "Never once has he questioned me while only offering his support," Kirkland said. "Being an independent manufacturer's representative early in my career allowed me to see things through a different set of glasses, seeing the return on time as the essential piece in developing the all-important foundation. Time with no return just doesn't work, you lose your external team instantly. Training is only valuable if we can turn it into dollars. Teaching how to sell versus product training is not the same. Independent manufacturer's reps sell what they know and are confident to talk about."

Kirkland calls being a teacher and mentor to his reps his proudest accomplishment, one he says is built at the ground level. "It's all accomplished at the micro level," he said. "In the field, working in one-on-one environments allows you to win their hearts and minds. Relationships are built one by one, face to face."

Asked for a favorite rep story, Kirkland said he has too many to count. "There is nothing I enjoy more than being in the field with our representatives," he said. "Yes, closing a sale is a given. Talking about the many friendships is the most rewarding."

For a recent example, he pointed to the 2026 Southern Wholesalers Association convention, where meetings with the company's reps blended business and family. "Business and family can be combined while accomplishing our business goals," Kirkland said. "I thoroughly enjoyed meeting the families of our representatives and distributor partners. Thank you SWA for being different."

On what it takes to build a strong rep-manufacturer relationship, Kirkland points to communication and commitment. "Once the honeymoon is over, year one, is the communication and excitement still there? When is the last time you spoke to your primary point of contact for each of your lines? In this case, more is better," he said. "Communication, 99% of the time, is about addressing a need in growing market share. That's the best type of communication. Communication is how you build relationships." He ties commitment to product knowledge, competition, and a passion to win, adding, "Success feeds future success." As one of his closest representatives told him, "You make it easy for us to sell your products, and we will deliver the results."

Looking ahead, Kirkland sees the role of representatives growing even as the layers of factory sales professionals shrink. "I travel with agencies when I need to, it's that easy," he said. "Working with an agency that delivers without my direct involvement is a waste of my time and our resources. It's all about trust and treating our representatives like a Mill-Rose family member. Agencies that are brand builders will be winners. Products sold on the merits of price will be controlled by a factory employee."

Kirkland credits AIM/R with connecting Mill-Rose to professionally run sales organizations rather than individual sellers. "Top to bottom, the agencies understand the business and work for the betterment of all parties," he said.

He singled out the CPMR certification (Certified Professional Manufacturer’s Representative) as a mark of that professionalism. "CPMR teaches a salesperson how to run a business, including

legal, ethical, human resources and mentoring. They are built for today and tomorrow. If the business dies when I leave, I have only been a seller."

For manufacturers not currently using reps, Kirkland's advice is straightforward. "Paid by commission, they win, we win. Its performance driven," he said. "Synergies gained from non-competing lines provide an immediate opening to similar account profiles. It provides a rich knowledge of the market, where to sell, and overall, a lower cost to the manufacturer. If growing market share is the goal, the answer is easy: IMR."

Reflecting on what the award means beyond this year, Kirkland said, "I hope that it serves as a reminder that each of us has the opportunity, and the obligation, to leave our industry stronger than we found it. The true measure of our careers will not be the awards on the shelf, but the people who succeed because we took time to provide mentoring."

Kirkland has more than 25 years of executive sales leadership and has served as National Sales Manager of Clean-Fit Products since joining The Mill-Rose Company in July 2016. Kirkland began his career in 1995 as President of Kirkland Sales, Inc., his own independent manufacturer's representative agency serving wholesale distributor partners in Western Pennsylvania.

The AIM/R board of directors and membership have a set of requirements that any Golden Eagle candidate must meet before consideration for the award, which includes:

- An individual in senior management of a manufacturing firm that utilizes manufacturers' reps and has a proven track record in support of manufacturers' reps being the most efficient, cost-effective method of going to market.
- Works cooperatively to develop and maintain a positive working relationship with manufacturers' representatives.
- Promotes the industry and has a positive influence on the industry by providing quality products and quality assurance.
- Provides for efficient communication of information to their manufacturers' reps and assures they are kept up to date on the industry and the manufacturer's product lines.
- Facilitates the rep's job through prompt filling of orders, prompt payment of commissions, by providing backup support in the event of a problem, and works closely with reps to assure customer satisfaction.
- Utilizes manufacturers' representatives, supports AIM/R, and participates in panels and industry events when invited.

# # #

Photo caption: *Jennifer Rodriguez, Vice President/Marsh & Moore – Clean-Fit's Florida representative, and John Kirkland, National Sales Manager for Clean-Fit Products*

*Photos courtesy of **Tija Medina Photography**.*

About The Mill-Rose Company

Founded in 1919 and headquartered in Mentor, Ohio, The Mill-Rose Company is the largest U.S. manufacturer of twisted-wire brushes and a world market leader in brushes for industrial, medical, and specialty applications. Strong demand from the plumbing, heating, and cooling industry led to the formation of Clean-Fit Products, Mill-Rose's fast-growing division serving professional contractors, hardware wholesalers, and home centers with a complete line of brushes, abrasives, sealants, and specialty tools, including the Blue Monster line of professional-grade products. Mill-Rose is a family-owned organization, now in its fourth generation. The company has experienced significant growth from its humble beginnings in 1919, and today operates manufacturing and warehouse facilities throughout the United States and Mexico. Mill-Rose has over 200,000 square feet of production facilities in the U.S. and Mexico, complemented by a 105,000 square foot U.S. distribution center. For more information, visit https://www.millrose.com.