

Profile

Hassell Free Building Supplies & Exports

From the Treasure Coast to the Caribbean — expert exporter of building supplies

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For *Progress & Innovation*

Throughout the Caribbean islands, buildings are being constructed and rehabbed with products shipped from the Treasure Coast.

Hassell Free Building Supplies & Exports in Palm City provides purchasing, warehousing and shipping services to clientele in the construction trade in the Caribbean including contractors, developers and hardware stores. The company also ships products to two medical schools on the islands.

Hassell Free is also a design-build firm with an architect on staff and several ongoing design/build projects in the Caribbean.

The company has nine full-time and three part-time employees.

The family-owned and -operated company began its export business in 1999. In 2004, the Hassell Free Tile & Windows showroom in Palm City opened to the general public as well as to the trades, though purchasing and exports comprise approximately 90 percent of the company's business.

'We know the Caribbean'

President/CEO Vernon Hassell said the company has 90 to 100 regular customers in the Caribbean who rely on Hassell Free because the company is both a supplier and a shipper and takes care of a customer's order from the moment it's placed until delivery.

"We know the Caribbean, we also get to know what our customers need and advise them on the right products for the Caribbean. Primarily, we function as an extension of the client's purchasing department," said Hassell. "We provide a unique service that allows us to be a one-stop shop for contractors in the Caribbean and be their exporter at the same time."

Hassell added that building supply companies not in the shipping business simply take the order and hand it off to a

shipping company. If the customer gets the wrong item, they are often stuck with it. If Hassell Free gets an order wrong, they fix it right away. "We babysit our orders," said Hassell.

Container shipments to islands

Hassell Free ships 50 to 60 ocean containers per year, valued at between \$3 and \$4 million. An ocean container is 40 feet. Hassell Free uses shipping lines out of Port Everglades and Port of Palm Beach.

Product is received, staged and palletized for each individual client at the company's Palm City warehouse. Hassell Free ships full container loads and will also deliver smaller product orders directly to the ports for shipping. Hassell said that his company is one of the only building supply companies that has regular container shipments to the islands they service.

Seventy percent of the company's sales are to the Dutch islands of St. Maarten, Saba, St. Eustatius, Aruba, Curacao and Bonaire. Hassell is a native of Saba.

The remaining 30 percent of its business is to the islands of St. Kitts, Nevis, Grenada and St. Thomas. Because of its relationship with the medical school in Saba, which Hassell Free designed and built, the company provides a special service to the students there. The company will consolidate students' online purchases from the U.S., containerize them and ship them to Saba.

"This is a very minimal part of our business but we provide the students with a taste of home that's hard to find on a remote Caribbean island," said Hassell.

Going forward, Hassell said the company is concentrating on building up sales to local clients through its showroom as well as continuing to expand its customer base in the Caribbean. Last year the company hired a marketing professional to help further



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Hassell Free Exports President/CEO Vernon Hassell



HOBIEHLER
Hassell Free Exports' Warehouse Manager Tyler Daily loads a shipment at Hassell Free Exports in Palm City.



HOBIEHLER
Hassell Free Exports President/CEO Vernon Hassell, left, helps warehouse manager Tyler Daily load a shipment.

develop its business.

Positive situation for exporting

Hassell believes one of the best markets in the future could be Cuba. "The

talks of lifting the trade embargo to Cuba may be a positive situation for our export business," he said.

Detailed information about the services provided by Hassell Free Building Supplies and Exports may be found at the company's web site, <http://www.hassellfree.com>.