

2009 Bedding Yearbook

Postcards from New England



Our man climbs up to the cab of the Showroom on Wheels, which is taking the ComforPedic Loft line to Simmons retailers around the country.

By David Perry

NASHUA, N.H. — I've met hundreds of mattress retailers over the years, but seldom in such a beautiful setting as the tree-shaded parking lot of the Radisson here on a lovely autumn afternoon.

The leaves were turning, a welcoming sun was shining, and the temperature was perfect. In fact, everything about that day was perfect, postcard perfect. Fall is spectacular in New England, as I discovered on three memorable days on the ComforPedic Retail Tour last month.

The parking lot here played host to the ComforPedic Showroom on Wheels, a snazzy 18-wheeler with a spiffy mattress

showroom tucked inside. I joined Simmons' specialty sleep executives Scott Smalling and Butch Webster in following the mobile showroom as it traversed Connecticut, Rhode Island, Massachusetts and New Hampshire to bring the new ComforPedic Loft line of memory foam beds to retailers in the picturesque villages, towns and — yes, cities, too — of New England.

It was, I am happy to report, a grand experience, full of retail insights. The trip was populated by friendly mattress retailers and cheerful, service-minded Simmons sales representatives and executives who mingled easily with their retail guests. And it played out each day against the backdrop of the changing of the leaves in

New England.

One of my hosts on the trip said the "leaf peepers" take center stage in the fall. Some come with high-tech cameras to take pictures that will adorn calendars sold across the country. Others come just to silently take in the majesty of the changing landscape, snapping mental pictures. And others, like Scott Smalling and Butch Webster, come on business but enjoy the colorful backdrop of the autumn crescendo, a free bonus.

In these stories I'll take you along with Scott and Butch on their three-day trip from Agawam, Mass., to Hicksville, N.Y. We crisscrossed the heart of New England, meeting retailers both small and large. I hope you enjoy the trip as much as I did.

Day One: On the road

By David Perry

MOVING THROUGH MASSACHUSETTS — We left the Simmons factory in Agawam, Mass., in late afternoon. This road show was on the road.

I settled into the backseat of the rental car and got to work. This was my chance to interview Scott Smalling, president of Simmons' specialty sleep division, and Butch Webster, vice president of that division. The two have worked together since Butch joined Scott at ComforPedic in 2005, a company purchased by Simmons two years later.

Now the two friends and colleagues are specialty sleep missionaries, spreading the gospel of better sleep on ComforPedic memory foam beds, cushioned with NxG foam, part of the special sauce they have perfected for retailers. Their mantra is a simple one: Their beds dissipate heat, offer faster recovery and provide more consistent comfort than other brands of memory foam.

Those messages are featured in bold type on the side



This map in the Showroom on Wheels traces the truck's journey across the U.S. and Canada.

of the 18-wheel Showroom on Wheels that Smalling and Webster are shadowing across the United States and Canada on a 10,000-mile plus sales odyssey, a unique venture in the annals of mattress marketing.

It has been a memorable journey, Smalling and Webster told me as we zipped through the dying light of a cool, cloudy autumn day, headed toward Providence, R.I., our stop that night. "Look how pretty this is," Webster exclaimed as we turned into a corridor of col-

orful trees. A few minutes later he pointed out the sunset, a yellow blaze he saw in the rear mirror. We craned our necks to admire the view. Striking sunrises and sunsets framed the long days of travel.

Life on the road is no picnic. It is, as any road warrior knows, a series of tiring days, travel hassles, quick meals, hotel beds that never really get comfortable, and hotels that all start to look alike. The ComforPedic Loft Retail Tour started in September and was going strong well

Highlights

Itinerary: I joined the tour at noon in Agawam, Mass., where Simmons operates a bedding factory. We ended the day in Providence, R.I.

Best meal: Pumpkin-seed encrusted salmon at Hemenway's Seafood Grill & Oyster Bar in Providence, overlooking the Providence River. We had a booth with a nice view of the dark river.

Surprise of the day: Shawn Slattery of Simmons gave me a Boston Red Sox hat, which I wore proudly that day. Alas, it didn't help: the Sox were swept out of the playoffs a few days later.



Butch Webster, left, and Scott Smalling at Hemenway's in Providence.

into November.

The tour has, Simmons officials said, been an unqualified success. "I've heard over and over how well positioned the line is," Smalling said. "Dealers have really embraced the line."

The new ComforPedic Loft line starts at \$999, a new starting price point for the ComforPedic line. New foam technology enabled the company to hit that lower price point, Smalling said.

The close rate for the

new Loft offerings has been extremely high, Smalling noted. Webster added that dealers appreciate that Simmons is bringing the line to them, helping them save their travel dollars. That's a good strategy for these tough times.

Soon darkness closed in and it was time to put my notebook away. The lights of Providence glowed in the distance, a beacon guiding us to our home-away-from-home that night.