Henry Herbert has seen the old days, the good days and the downright bad days. The president of Top's Woodwork and Supply Inc. grew up on Johnston Street when it was a gravel road called the Maurice Highway. “The biggest thing as a kid was the Greyhound, but from Asheville Route 60 as it came by,” he says.

Herbert lived with his parents on his mother's family’s farm—the two a Laguna, where Ashby Methodist Church and LaFonda's Restaurant are now located. Felice and Leonie drive across Johnston Street from where the farm used to be—where a named for Herbert’s maternal grandparents. Herbert remembers as a boy hitching the mules to a metal-wheelbored wagon and hauling sugarcane from the farm down to the Chelabana Mall, and later, moved the showroom there, too. And then the wheels came off.

“In the middle 60’s, it was tragic,” remembers Herbert. “We were losing money so fast, I couldn’t keep track of it.” The payroll bottomed out at 32 employees.

In the bust, the Herberts, like everyone else, learned the 11th commandment: Thou shall diversify. And though cabinets and appliances still predominate, Top's has expanded beyond kitchens and beyond Lafayette.

A decade ago, Top’s began to outfit the interior of boats with woodwork and cabinetry. What began as a response to the requests of a few individuals became largely through word of mouth—a 20 percent of Top’s business. The company has outfitted diners boats, yachts, tugboats and is getting in on the riverboat casino business. Just before Thanksgiving, Top’s received a call from the company that operates the Dutch cruise ship Njordan of New Orleans. Company officials hired Top’s to refit cabin aboard the ship, which had been seriously damaged in a collision with a freighter. The job, been a boon for Top’s and has laid the foundation for what Herbert thinks will be an exceptionally good year.

Six years ago, in another effort to diversify, Top’s opened an office and showroom in New Orleans. Depending only upon word of mouth and a small ad in Gambit, New Orleans’ newsw, their kitchen remodeling business has taken off and now accounts for 25 percent of Top’s revenues. Business in Lafayette has been good, too. “It’s picking up pretty good right now,” says Herbert of the local economy. “Lafayette is in a position to do good, steady growth.” After years of tumultuous growth and decline, steady anything would be welcome by Henry Herbert.