

## In 86 Years, Standard Window Shade Has Traveled From New Haven To Cyberspace

By JANICE PODSADA The Hartford Courant April 15, 2009



Ralph and Anni Colavolpe in their house in South Lyme, where they run Standard Window Shade. Ralph Colavolpe, whose grandfather founded the company in 1923 in New Haven, inherited the business in 1977 and made it an Internet-only outlet in 1995. (RICHARD MESSINA / THE HARTFORD COURANT / April 15, 2009)

OLD LYME - If Standard Window Shade were a cat, it would be sprinting along on its third life.

Founded by Vincenzo and Lucy Colavolpe in 1923, the New Haven company originally manufactured window shades, including dark green blackout shades that were used during World War II to protect against the threat of enemy bombings, said Ralph Colavolpe Jr., the company's president and third-generation owner.

After Colavolpe's father, Ralph Colavolpe Sr., inherited the business in 1957, he expanded the factory's retail outlet, adding decorative window shades, miniblinds and other products over the years.

In 1977, Ralph Colavolpe Sr. died suddenly, leaving the company to his plucky but inexperienced teenage son.

Although the business had been in the family for half a century, Colavolpe had to overcome his clients' skepticism.

"As a 17-year-old, I had to sell myself," said Colavolpe, now 50. "They were probably thinking, 'What's this kid going to do, take the money and run?'"

Eventually, Colavolpe closed the manufacturing portion of the business and moved the retail outlet from New Haven to East Haven. In 1995, Standard Window Shade underwent its third transformation and became an Internet-only outlet after Colavolpe's mother was diagnosed with cancer.

Although Standard Window Shade still maintains a business office and storage facility in East Haven, its Internet presence allows Colavolpe and his wife, Anni, to work from their home in the South Lyme section of Old Lyme overlooking Rocky Neck State Park and Long Island Sound. The business's Web address is [www.standardwindowshade.com](http://www.standardwindowshade.com).

The Colavolpes' windows are a proving ground for remote controlled shades. "They're controlled by radio frequency — you don't even need to point the old eye-beam at them," Colavolpe said — a feature that makes them virtually dog- and cat-proof.

The most recent generation of window shades are designed to insulate and save energy. Prices range from \$50 to thousands of dollars.

"Business is good, considering the downturn," said Colavolpe, who would not disclose financial information about the privately held company. "It's a depressing time. A lot of people are trying to do something nice in their house that makes them feel good."

Despite Standard Window's transformation from factory to bricks-and-mortar storefront to Internet sales, Colavolpe said he follows the same business strategy as his grandparents: "I don't take a deposit from customers," he said. "If I do a good job — you pay me."