

## A Sure Win!



## The New Balance Story

### Fearlessly Independent

Independent since 1906, we empower people through sport and craftsmanship to create positive change in communities around the world.

### Responsible Leadership

<https://www.newbalance.com/responsible-leadership.html>

### New Balance Press Box

<https://newbalance.newsmarket.com/>

### Join New Balance

<https://www.newbalance.com/membership>

## New Balance

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# New Balance: A Century of Getting Fit Right

This is a fascinating story of a company that started, literally, from the ground up. The New Balance story began, oddly enough, in a Boston backyard, with a man watching chickens.

In 1906, an English immigrant named William J. Riley founded the New Balance Arch Support Company. He wasn't dreaming of sneakers or marathons — he was trying to solve a simple, stubborn problem: shoes that didn't fit people properly.

Watching chickens strut across his yard, Riley noticed something almost nobody else had bothered to see — their three-clawed feet gave them perfect, effortless balance on any ground. [1] He built his first product, a flexible arch support with three points of contact, around that same idea. He even kept chicken feet on his desk to show customers exactly what he meant. [2]

It was a strange way to start a company. But it was an idea that worked.

Riley's business wasn't athletic footwear, at least not at first. It was orthopedic. He built arch supports and prescription-style shoe inserts for people whose feet genuinely hurt — police officers, postal carriers, factory workers, anyone on their feet all day.

Advertising was mostly satisfied customers word of mouth. A lot of business came on the recommendation of a doctor. [3]

In 1927, William hired a traveling salesman named Arthur Hall to carry that message door to door, and by 1934 Hall had earned a partnership in the company. [4]

This quiet, uncomplicated arrangement kept New Balance alive for its first three decades: not hype, not advertising, just people whose feet felt better and told their friends.

In the course of time, William Riley quietly turned over the helm to the rising generation without a lot of fanfare. What Riley left behind wasn't a personal legacy so much as an idea stitched into the company's name and its product: Build for the actual foot, not an average one.

Ownership passed to Arthur Hall's family in the 1950's. Hall's daughter Eleanor and her husband, Paul Kidd were running the show in the '70's. [5] In 1972, Paul Kidd was ready to retire. The little company of six employees turning out thirty pairs of shoes a day with no advertising budget to speak of — needed a buyer. [6]

Jim Davis enters the story when he was 28, working in medical-equipment sales, and looking to own something of his own. A friend mentioned that Paul Kidd was looking to sell. [7] Davis was interested – but cautious. He did his homework. He took time to talk with New Balance's small, loyal customer base. He listened to their reasons why they kept buying a shoe nobody was advertising. He became convinced more people needed these shoes – if only they knew about them.

Jim could easily see this small company had no strategic marketing effort. The owners did not see the need for investing their profits on advertising. For decades they had relied on word of mouth. Increasing sales meant having to hire more talent to make more shoes. Staying small had its advantages. But things were about to change.

Jim saw the potential for going big, in a big way. He decided to take a chance and jumped in with both feet. (No pun intended.) He used his own savings and get the rest of the money with a long-term bank loan — and paid \$100,000 to buy the New Balance Arch Support Company – lock, stock, and barrel.

Jim paid almost exactly what the company had made in total sales the year before. [8]

The deal closed on the day of the Boston Marathon, April 17, 1972. [9] Nobody planned it that way; it was simply the day the papers were signed. But for a company about to spend the next fifty years building shoes for runners and walkers alike, it's the kind of coincidence a good story doesn't waste.

Jim Davis didn't just buy a shoe company — he bought an idea nobody else was chasing. He bet building shoes in a range of widths, for real feet was where real people were looking – for solutions to their very real problem of tired feet and aching backs.

Jim backed that bet with marketing instinct most shoemakers of the era simply didn't have. Davis had spent his early career learning how to sell. Now he had a product that sold itself quietly, one satisfied customer at a time. Things were about to get loud.

Another thing – Jim kept the company independent. Through decades of consolidation that swallowed up competitor after competitor into larger conglomerates, Davis kept New Balance as a privately held enterprise — a decision that kept control of marketing strategy and shoe making policies.

Today, the Davis family still owns roughly 95 percent of the company. [10]

When Jim got control, he scaled his new private enterprise — enormously — without ever letting go of the founding idea.

What started as thirty pairs a day with six employees has now grown into a global brand selling billions of dollars a year in footwear and apparel, still designing shoes across an unusually wide range of widths, from narrow to extra wide, and still manufacturing a significant number of shoes in the United States. [11]

From a chicken yard in 1906, through a partnership built on sore feet and word of mouth, to a marathon-day closing in 1972, to millions of shoes flying off the shelves today, New Balance has a global footprint that hasn't faded away.

**Prime Directive:**            **Fit first, everything else second.**

This is why New Balance builds separate collections for walking, for hiking and trail, for everyday life — not because the terrain changes what a foot needs, but because getting the width right is what lets one good shoe handle all of it.

New Balance offers optional membership accounts, but anyone can shop and buy online at <https://newbalance.com> – without an account and still check out as guests.

**However**, you might be surprised by the perks New Balance membership offers.

**First:** **Membership costs you nothing.** It's a free account — no subscription fee, no minimum purchase, and it's explicitly not a points-based loyalty program. You get the benefits as soon as you sign up and verify the account.

**Second:** You get **Free Shipping on every order;** (non-members pay standard shipping, roughly \$9.95 on orders under \$75).

**You also get:**

- Free returns (non-members may face a restocking fee on returns)
- Access to your 3D foot scan stored on your account, for future fit reference
- Early access to select new product launches
- Special offers and promotions, including a welcome discount on your first order
- Birthday offer each year

You may become a member of the New Balance family by going online at: <https://www.newbalance.com/membership/> and creating your own account.

**New Balance employee reviews** run fairly positive company-wide: roughly 73-77% of employees on Glassdoor say they'd recommend working there to a friend, and the current CEO, Joe Preston, gets an 87-89% approval rating. Culture and values scores sit between 4.0 and 4.4 – out of 5. A recurring theme in reviews: "no sense of hierarchy for hierarchy's sake" & "leadership is approachable, down-to-earth, always happy to listen."

**Corporate/Boston HQ reviews** skew notably more positive than some individual retail store reviews — a few retail locations have pulled in complaints about cliquey management or inconsistent scheduling, which is a common pattern for large companies where corporate culture and individual store culture can diverge.

### **So, someone asked, “Do corporate executives mingle with employees?”**

There's real evidence this is a deliberate design choice, not just talk. When New Balance built its current world headquarters at Boston Landing in 2015-2016, the CEO at the time (Rob DeMartini) said explicitly that the building was designed with large open work spaces and "much less individual space and much more open public space," modeled partly on the openness of their Lawrence, Massachusetts factory floor.

Architecturally, Boston Landing is built around what one project description calls "flexible, open, non-hierarchical workspace" — no walled executive suites, deliberately mixed with communal areas. Employee reviews back that up with comments about approachable leadership. One caveat: an older review also noted the office is "four floors of cubicles" with employees fairly separated — so it may vary by department or hasn't been perfectly uniform.

### **Do shoemakers talk to designers?**

New Balance keeps design and development work in the U.S. and manufactures a meaningful share of shoes domestically (five factories across Massachusetts and Maine), which puts designers, engineers, and factory teams in much closer physical proximity than a competitor manufacturing entirely overseas. Also, there is a cultural signal in the product line itself — they've released shoes literally named after and dedicated to specific factories (Lawrence, Skowhegan) as a way of honoring the people who make them.

### **What about the Sales force?**

New Balance sells through owned retail stores (with a large hourly retail sales staff — "Retail Sales Associate" is one of their most common job listings), direct e-commerce, and wholesale distribution to other retailers.

**Bottom line:** the picture that holds up under research is a company with a genuinely positive low-hierarchy corporate culture, a headquarters built to erase walls between executives and staff, and design engineers that have timely access and work closer to nearby manufacturing talent than most competitors.

**New Balance is here to stay. Their core values say it all:**

“Our purpose captures what our brand stands for, reflects our long-standing values, and is woven into every aspect of our company. We strive to unite people through sport and its principles of respect and fair play. We believe we can help shape the future of sport and culture in which all voices are welcome and heard. We are committed to creating positive change by lifting communities through access and opportunity to healthy, active living and education. Every person associated with New Balance — including our associates, athletes, ambassadors, and partners — has a responsibility to embrace, endorse, and amplify our purpose.

Our company’s global culture, which we call “One NB,” is centered around our core values of integrity, teamwork, and total customer satisfaction. Our workplaces reflect our people-centric culture, as we dedicate resources to help our associates continually learn, grow, and succeed.

As a privately held, family-owned company, we believe in taking a long-term view and making strategic investments that reflect our core values and benefit our business and people.” Source Citation <https://www.newbalance.com/our-purpose.html>

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These two sources only confirm that Retail Sales Associate is a common, frequently-posted role — they don't document New Balance's wholesale sales force structure (direct reps vs. independent reps vs. hybrid). This piece is thin in the citations with no source authoritative enough to cite a specific claim.

**Note:** Several details of New Balance's early ownership history (e.g., the exact year Riley stepped back, and some accounts calling Paul Kidd rather than Eleanor Hall Kidd the direct buyer's counterpart) are inconsistently reported across secondary sources, since the company is privately held and didn't maintain a public historical archive for this period. Facts above reflect the most consistent account across multiple independent sources; where sources conflicted, the more detailed/sourced account was used.

**New Balance** is a privately held company owned by billionaire businessman **Jim Davis and his family**, who control an estimated **95% of the business**. Davis bought the small, Boston-based shoemaker in 1972 and transformed it into a global athletic apparel empire.

<https://www.forbes.com/profile/jim-davis/>

**Jim Davis Story Highlights**

**The Acquisition:** On the day of the **1972 Boston Marathon**, Jim Davis purchased New Balance for roughly **\$100,000**. At the time, the company had just **six employees** making **30 pairs of shoes a day**. [1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6]

**Early Life:** Born to **Greek immigrant parents**, he got his start carrying heavy trays as a "lumper" in his father's restaurants. He initially studied **biology and chemistry** to pursue medicine until a college professor recognized his talent for sales. [1, 2]

**Home Based Strategy:** While rivals like Nike aggressively outsourced production overseas, Davis committed to keeping a portion of **manufacturing in New England**. He also scaled the business by focusing on unique features, like offering running shoes in multiple width sizes. [1, 2, 3]

**Family Leadership:** Davis serves as the **Chairman**. His wife, **Anna Davis**, joined the company in 1977 and serves as the **Vice Chairman**. [1, 2, 3]

**Massive Growth:** Under Jim's oversight, New Balance has grown into a powerhouse with billions in annual sales. As of 2026, Forbes estimates his family net worth to be **over \$5 billion**. [1, 2]

**Philanthropy:** Through the New Balance Foundation, the family has donated hundreds of millions of dollars globally to support healthcare, education, and youth development. This includes massive, historic contributions to institutions like **Massachusetts General Hospital**. [1]