

## Sons Carrying On Family Tradition At JSI

By Vicki Gross

There are likely millions of sons who are carrying on in their fathers' footsteps, and even in small communities, one may find father and son combinations continuing a family career. That is apparent at JSI in Orleans as there are seven father/son combinations in one department where the younger is following after his father, and in this case, it is in the same craft.

In a manufacturing plant that covers acres of ground, with several departments, the upholstery division has more than usual the share of father and son combinations working in the same department.

Upholstery in the furniture business is basically a craft, which takes months or years to learn fully. Some of the fathers in this group have been in this craft for decades, and are currently teaching their sons what they have learned through hard work and perseverance.

Gary White, having been an upholsterer for 38 years, despite his youthful looks, said he likes "building quality product." He said when he first began, he had to work with a lot of cotton, and the whole job has always involved hands-on training.

Ben, the younger male of the White duo, has been at the factory for nine years. He started working in different departments, then settled in to working alongside his dad.

Ben said, "It started out as just a job." He added with a grin, "Guess it's a career now."

Gary said, "It's been a good life for me."

He said that when he first began, he had to work with a lot of cotton while upholstering the chairs, but now, some pieces of upholstery are made to slip over the form of the chair.

The upholsterers finished product is all hand crafted. No robotic work is involved.

Jeremy Smitson cited that the plant is a good place to work and there were "good people" to work for and with.

He relayed, "This is not something that just anyone can do. It is skilled labor."

He shared that it took about six months for him to learn to do a perfect job on just one type of chair.

Smitson has been on that job around 11 years and his son, Tre, recently joined as a high school intern in mid-January.

Tre is a senior at Paoli High School. He said he, personally, likes the hands on work better than being in a classroom all day. His dad is training him in upholstery at the facility.

Joe and Brian Key make up another of the father/son duos. Joe has been an upholsterer for 17 years, with his son coming to work with him in February.

Brian, who is a homeschooled student, said he likes the money, and after weighing several options he had in mind, "This seemed like the best option." He voiced his appreciation for the laid-back environment. (As witnessed when noting that radios were turned on, and some had been tuned in to the IU basketball game, an upset against Michigan.)

Joe was deemed as very knowledgeable about his upholstering trade.

Rick Richardson's father is his trainer in the craft. The elder Richardson, Paul, has been working at it for 40 years.

Rick said, "I like it. It's hard work, but not horrible."

He added, "I like that I can step back and see something I did. It's like art, everything conforms together."

(Paul Richardson was out that day, so was unavailable for comment.)

Another father/son combination is Brian Kloss and his son, Braydon Kloss. Brian is the CNC for the upholstery, with Braydon setting up in the division. Brian's daughter, Jordan Wilder, also works at the com-

pany, although in technical services.

And, one additional combo is Bryan and Cory Hess. Bryan has been an employee for 15 years, and Cory, six years.

A couple of young men, Kinzer Threlkeld and Landon Padgett, are working as interns in the upholstery department. They are there through the Lost River Cooperative program. That program provides class time for the youth, also.

Andy Roll, who oversees the upholstery division at JSI, commented that chairs made at the plant, have gone to several places, including Florida State University, Notre Dame University, University of Louisville, University of Kentucky, Indiana University, several restaurants, and also the Kentucky School for the Deaf.

One particularly proud accomplishment of the institution was the modification of chairs to fit the Notre Dame football team.

Roll shared how they first visited the school and when the first gentlemen arrived to see the entourage, he wondered why the chairs needed to be any bigger, then he said with a laugh, "The actual football team arrived."

Chris Edwards, who is vice president of manufacturing, said he began in the upholstery department, also. He shared, "The workers all show a passion for their work."

A comment received from Mike Wagner, president and CEO of Jasper Group, was, "The reason I love this program is that it goes to the heart of what we are trying to do. Our ultimate goal is to keep this business strong, so the next generation has a stable place to work, and so they can provide for their future families, which is essential to keeping our communities strong."