

MADE ON THE SOUTH COAST

# A LASTING LEGACY

*More than a dozen multi-generational businesses in our region share stories of their families' persistence and successes*



BY SAWYER  
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PHOTOGRAPHY BY  
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*Running a business is tough. Maintaining success so that it passes to another generation is even more of a challenge. South Coast Almanac profiles 13 companies that have stayed in business over multiple generations—in manufacturing, service, hospitality, and more.*

## Kyler Seafood

NEW BEDFORD

Throughout Kyler Seafood are six family members who work in all aspects of the business – from cooking in the kitchen to managing shipping operations. Even the boyfriend of the CEO's daughter is included. "They've been together forever," says Jeff Nanfelt, 59, the current CEO of Kyler Seafood and the third generation to run the retailer/wholesaler. "He's like family to us."

Troy, 25, has worked full time since 2020 as a salesman in the restaurant division, but since eighth grade he worked summers with his old man. "I think it helps being a smaller business," says Troy of the benefits of working with family. "It definitely helps keep the morale and the teamwork thing together. You know you can rely on them. You know we're all in it for the same reasons."

And for the Nanfelts, family is everything. Even the name, "Kyler" comes from the combined names of Jeff's nephews, Kyle and Tyler.

It's clear that Troy gives his father some peace of mind that Kyler Seafood will be in good hands for another generation. He says that unlike some of the friends he made while attending Babson College for business, he's taking a unique path and doing something that he truly wants to do.

"The fish business isn't easy, it starts early and ends late. I saw my father working hard. But I still thought, 'I'd like to take over,'" says Jeff, looking at Troy, "I'll let you know when I hand the keys over."

"It's more than just a business – it's our life," says Troy. "Without sounding too cliché or weird, even when we go home – we eat dinner as a family almost every night. We talk about Kyler. We're always talking about it, how to improve it."

"We've been blessed as a family," says Jeff. "From my grandfather through my father to me and now to Troy ... this doesn't happen often. It's a good thing to see." —SS-P

# Worleybeds

NEW BEDFORD

Worleybeds on Pope's Island may look like an unassuming storefront, but this mattress factory and retailer is the culmination of over 70 years of dedication from one family.

Displayed with pride above the store's front desk are photographs of John Worley Sr. and John Worley Jr., the first two owners of the business. Now, after taking over from his mother, Martha, Patrick Worley, 36, is a third generation at the helm.

Worley says that his parents never pressured him to work in the family business. Instead, they emphasized a college education so that he could "do something other than [work] in a factory."

But Worley took his college degree and used it to jump right into the industry, driving delivery trucks for the company while he learned the ins and outs of the mattress business.

Throughout the years, admitted Worley, there have been challenges and disagreements between the different generations. He created some father-son tension when he took over the business and shifted the focus away from wholesale production—something that his father spent his time perfecting,

But Worley was quick to add that although conflicts during the work day can bleed into the home, there was nothing better than working with his dad.

"I'm just joyous for the time that we got. Even though he died young, I was lucky I got to spend a lot of time with my old man—I mean, a lot of time," he says. "I used to go on the road with him when I was learning how to drive."

"I have four young children," says Worley, when asked about the future of the business. "Maybe one of them will be interested in doing it—and maybe they won't."

As the fourth Worley to own the business, he can see how Worleybeds not only has a special place in his heart, but in the community.

"A lot of the customers told me stories about my family that I would have never heard—about my grandparents, my parents—things that are funny, things that are sad," says Worley. "A lot of people miss my grandparents, a lot of people miss my dad, and I imagine that someday when my picture is up there on the wall people will be boohooing about me." —SS-P



## Cape Cod Shipbuilding Company

WAREHAM

Gordon and Wendy Goodwin



Martha and Patrick Worley

Wendy Goodwin, president of the 123-year-old business Cape Cod Shipbuilding Company, says she gained very specific gems of wisdom from her father and grandfather.

From her grandfather, the late Les Goodwin—the man who helped pioneer the fiberglass sailboat during World II that seeded the company's success—she learned about history and the evolving tastes of sailors. "He had quite a vision and met and exceeded that. His tenacity kept things going; he taught me a lot."

Her father, Gordon Goodwin, who remains a daily presence at the company facility on Narrows Road, offers a steady wealth of knowledge and an understanding of what it's like to inherit a family business.

"My dad doesn't want to stop. He loves people and what he does. I'm thankful he is here. Sometimes we have newer employees who need his wealth of knowledge; there are days I need it from him," she says.

Goodwin also benefits from the hard work of her employees to run a company that provides manufacturing, maintaining, and storage for fine quality, pleasure sailboats. The boats are built by people, not computers, she emphasizes.

Wendy joined Cape Cod Shipbuilding Company in 1993, the year before her 95-year-old grandfather passed away. While

in college, she worked part-time during the summers cleaning and launching boats, before returning to the business full time. Her father served as president until 2011 before handing the reins to Goodwin.

Wendy notes the trend of second-generation business owners tending to bow to the first generation. Faced with an evolving industry, the third generation may be required to implement changes. Often, she has to speak up and make that call—whether to discontinue a beloved sailboat or decide it doesn't make financial sense to provide service and repair for all of the parts they build (a goal of her grandfather's).

Decisions to keep the boatyard closed during the pandemic also were challenging.

"It killed my father to watch other boatyards stay open. I had never been more challenged to speak up for what is best for employees and companies as we transitioned," she says.

She notes that after a closure they eventually were able to get all of the boats up and sailing that season, in part due to her continual work maintaining the facility while employees stayed home.

"The key was communication. Grandpa and my father taught me that skill," she says. —LP



## Lafrance Hospitality

WESTPORT

For Richard Lafrance, 75, CEO of Lafrance Hospitality, a family business brings out the best in everyone.

After going to college and serving in the Army, Lafrance began working with his parents, Roland and Rita, who founded White's of Westport in 1955. Now, after decades of growing and running the business he is slowly handing over the reins to the third generation of the Lafrance family.

"It's really good because we know everyone's strengths and weaknesses," he says on what it's like to work with family. "We know that no matter what, we're going to look after each other."

And when Lafrance says everyone, he really means everyone. Over eight other family members including his own children, their spouses, grandchildren, nieces and nephews all work together to make the business what it is.

And Lafrance Hospitality has room for everyone. With franchise hotels across Massachusetts and New Hampshire,

and venues and restaurants in New Bedford, Westport and more, there is always a way to keep family involved.

According to Lafrance, his children – who would be the third generation involved – work mostly on the restaurant side. They run a tight ship but he says there's always room for a little parental oversight.

"I'm very focused on the details," says Lafrance. "I'm not under the gun, I can walk around without the pressure of having to do something that minute, unlike them. It's all under control, but I still like to be involved."

With Richard monitoring the details, his children running the restaurants, and his grandchildren picking up summer shifts at the hotels, the family atmosphere of Lafrance Hospitality is paramount.

"We fit the mold of hospitality – that's what we do. When you go to somebody's home, you want to feel welcomed, and I think that's what drives us." —SS-P

## Kirby Paint

NEW BEDFORD

George Kirby, 56, is the seventh-generation owner of Kirby Paint. Since 1846, his family has supplied a special mix of marine paint—a recipe that has been passed down for over 175 years—to maritime industries across the country.

Now, George, his wife Shari and cousin Bill work to keep the family tradition alive. "I'm more like a steward," says George, who took time from personally unloading an incoming supply truck to talk with us. "I just have to keep things going straight."

With the three-person operation at Kirby Paint, it's all hands on deck. All three Kirbys deal with customers: George mixes the paint using manual, old-time methods he learned from his father, and Sharon does the bookkeeping.

For George, working with family can be "wonderful and awful at the same time." While he truly loves working alongside his wife and cousin, and in the past, his father, he admits that it can be tough at times.



"My father and I used to butt heads a lot—he didn't want to accept credit cards for the longest time and I had to really argue with him about that," says George. "He was very old-school." But after Kirby returned from service in the Air Force, "things were better" between the two.

The most important thing he learned from his family, says George, is to treat people with kindness—something he learned from his grandfather.

"He was always very nice, very fair—I've never seen a customer get mad at my grandfather. That's who I try to emulate," he says. "Don't be so quick to push customers out. Let them tell you a story if they want to tell you a story. I have a couple chairs right near the counter ... sometimes people just need to talk." —SS-P

## Dawson Realty

MATTAPOISETT

Dawson Real Estate founder Sandra Dawson is fiercely proud that her children are taking the reins of the small agency. Semi-retired, she still pitches in with marketing and other tasks, but for now, is pleased to sit back and watch children Sandy Dawson Galavotti and Patrick Dawson take the lead.

"If you establish a small business and you can see that your children are going to take it over, that makes you so proud that what you've worked for so long just doesn't disappear," she says.

Before Dawson launched Dawson Real Estate in 1978, she was a registered nurse in the Boston area. Balancing her work and raising children proved challenging at that time, so she obtained her real estate license.

As a child, Galavotti recalls her mother setting up her office at the dining room table, and an off-limits blue rotary phone that served as the office line. She overheard her mother's conversations with clients—learning some real estate lingo in



the process—and accompanied her on rides to client meetings. This was before Dawson purchased the office in 1986 on Route 6, which remains its base of operations today.

Both Galavotti and her brother, Patrick Dawson, pursued successful careers (Galavotti in finance and banking and Patrick in education)

before settling in Mattapoisett at the family business.

Galavotti and Patrick have 20 years and 16 years, respectively, in the books at the agency, and find that having clearly defined roles and responsibilities allows for a smoothly run business.

Galavotti already is getting the next generation involved: her eldest, 18, is in charge of installing the "For Sale" signs.

"They see it's all-hands-on-deck with a family business," she says. "I have enjoyed working in a family-run office with more than 40 years of professional real estate experience," adds Patrick. —LP

# T.M. Ryder Insurance

MIDDLEBORO



Kira Watkins and Kristi Cornuet

The past two years have been a whirlwind for Kira Watkins and Kristi Cornuet. They lost their father, Ralph Maddigan III, and welcomed Cornuet's daughter, Charlotte, into the world—all during the pandemic.

Now the sisters are poised to purchase the family business as fourth-generation owners. Watkins describes T.M. Ryder—an insurance agency founded in 1877—as a blend of modern and classic. They both endeavor to make their mark while honoring their father's legacy as a community-oriented, driven business leader.

“Our core values came from our dad. Professionalism, ethics, authenticity, community, and education are important to us when it comes to business,” says Cornuet, who initially pursued a career in sports management before “getting wooed” by her father and sister to join T.M. Ryder.

Watkins, who spent several years working at Enterprise, joined T.M. Ryder in January 2011, about four years earlier than her sister. “Now that I’m in it, it makes so much sense to me. It’s clearly in my DNA,” she says, noting her tendency to view the world through a risk management lens.

Both say their father never expected his daughters to follow in his footsteps. “If you asked him 15 years ago if anyone would end up in his business, he’d say no. When two out of three of his children joined him, he was delighted,” Watkins says.

Watkins now serves as office manager and oversees the commercial line and Cornuet is the marketing manager who handles the personal line sales. They were set to purchase the business when their father got sick; now they are close to finalizing the sale. Both look forward to molding the company with a focus on their core values.

One of them is education. “Insurance is boring to people. We want to make it fun and approachable,” Cornuet says. To that end, they have created fun YouTube videos to engage folks on the topic. “I changed the lyrics of popular songs to relate to insurance. It has been well received. It’s a lot of fun for us, too.”

They welcome any children or nieces/nephews to carry the torch into the fifth generation—but no pressure.

“It would be nice to pass it along and keep it in the family, but it’s not an expectation,” Cornuet says. —LP

# Blount Fine Foods

FALL RIVER

When Eddie B. Blount founded Blount Seafood in the 1880s he may never have imagined what it would become. Now, more than 120 years and five generations later, Blount Fine Foods has stretched across the country to both Texas and Oregon.

Though a large operation, Blount never forgot its roots. According to F. Nelson “Todd” Blount, the current CEO who took over in 2000, there is a weight to carrying the Blount legacy on his shoulders.

“As the fifth-generation leader, I started with a great company with invaluable assets, a sterling reputation ... and most important, a team with a strong connection to the past,” says

Blount. “Every employee has worked with someone who has been here longer [than me].”

The thread of tradition that followed Blount inspires him to not only maintain the company, but to innovate. What started as an operation harvesting oysters in the Narragansett Bay now supplies Panera Bread, and maintains a line of organic food found in supermarkets.

“My vision for Blount is not ‘What we will do’ but rather ‘How we will do it,’” says Blount, who pulls everything he can from the legacy of his father, Frederick Blount. —SS-P



COURTESY OF BLOUNT FINE FOODS

# Surprenant & Beneski

NEW BEDFORD



Daniel Surprenant and Michelle Beneski

Robert Surprenant had been a general law practitioner in the Greater New Bedford area when his mother fell ill. That experience prompted him to announce to his daughter Michelle Beneski that he only wanted to specialize in elder law and estate planning. Michelle says her brother Daniel Surprenant joined the firm and both are now co-owners and certified as elder law attorneys by the National Elder Law Foundation. They are two out of only 24 CELA attorneys practicing in Massachusetts.

Michelle admits, “We have a different style and approach to the business than our dad. However, he was easy going and supported us to do what we thought was best.”

What are the benefits of working with family in one's work life? “Sharing the same value system, too, means we have a similar approach to the business,” says Daniel.

Across the generations, Surprenant & Beneski has been delivering practical legal advice about how best to protect your future and those you love.

COURTESY OF SURPRENANT & BENESKI



The late Alvin Almeida founded the company, which is now run by his children Luke Almeida (left) and Amy Prigmore (right), the COO and CEO, respectively.

# New England Electropolishing

FALL RIVER

New England Electropolishing, one of the few metal finishers in the U.S. focused on precision stainless steel electropolishing, operates out of a 17,500-square-foot facility. The company's backstory epitomizes the great American dream: an entrepreneur finding a gap in the market, running a thriving business to meet that need, and passing the reins to his children.

When selling electropolishing chemicals to finishing companies in the 1980s, Alvin Almeida observed that finishers could not finish small parts with a consistently high level of quality. In response, he launched New England Electropolishing and soon acquired Gillette as a customer. The company now employs 35 and serves a broad base of customers—predominantly in the medical and semiconductor industries. Almeida passed away in August 2019.

His children, Amy Prigmore (CEO) and Luke Almeida (COO), both pursued professional careers elsewhere before joining the family business. Prigmore says “the lifeblood” of the company is the employees who do the old-fashioned labor, which entails an electrochemical process to remove material from the metals to improve their surface finish.

The siblings grew up in the business. The younger

Almeida worked on the production line during high school and college; Prigmore did inspections and clerical work.

“There is no job between the two of us we haven't done,” Prigmore says.

Almeida often says he imagines what his father would say when negotiating an order. “As the business has grown and become healthier, I do a lot of quoting and estimating. Sometimes I hear his voice tell me, ‘bring it down a bit.’ My father was a salesman at heart. He always wanted to get the order.”

Their father had gradually transitioned control to his children—in particular during the winters he spent in Florida.

As he got older, the elder Almeida still liked to oversee employee retirement plans. Offering 401(k) plans and setting up the employees for retirement—many whose tenure exceeded 20 years—was of great importance to him. The children carry that legacy forward.

“Over time, he let more and more go. It was a great blessing from him, that he allowed us to cut our teeth and make decisions. He was very respectful. He allowed us to operate in a way we could be independent but still rely on him. It was a great confidence builder for both of us,” Almeida says. —LP

PHOTOS COURTESY OF NEW ENGLAND ELECTROPOLISHING

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# Humphrey, Covill & Coleman Insurance

NEW BEDFORD

Raymond A. Covill, the third-generation owner of Humphrey, Covill & Coleman Insurance Agency, is known to go above and beyond.

A classic story of his work ethic: When a distraught customer came to the office, upset to find her car covered in spray paint, Covill sprung to action. Instead of declining to help because her policy didn't cover such damage, he and his son, Peter Covill, pulled up their sleeves to scrub the paint off themselves in the July heat.

Peter, now the current co-owner of Humphrey, Covill & Coleman Insurance Agency with sister Lisa Covill Gibson, fondly relayed this story when reflecting on the values his father instilled in him. "My father always taught me to look for other ways to help people."

The siblings strive to uphold the family legacy of hard work—which stretches back nearly 100 years. Their grandfather, Raymond F. Covill, along with partner Ernest Humphrey, launched the business in 1926. Since then, the company has insured many South Coast institutions—including the original Zeiterion and now-shuttered Lincoln Park—and even a blimp in the early 1930s.



Peter Covill and Lisa Covill Gibson

Growing up, the siblings never felt pressured to join the family business.

"After graduating from college and moving around the country for a couple of years, I decided it was finally time to return to my roots and work for my Dad. On my first day at the office, my father handed me an auto insurance policy to bring home and study," Gibson says.

Over the past few years, their father has stepped back—letting the duo run the business in his absence while he winters in Florida.

"It wasn't always easy running the ship, but he says, 'I trust your judgment.'" Gibson says.

Today the company, which employs eight, is thriving, Gibson says. "We have clients who have been with us over 75 years and reminisce about insuring their first car with us. Now their great-great-grandchildren are insured with us."

Gibson, looking to retire soon, says she is steadily grooming her son—a current quality manager—to take over. "I handed an auto policy to the fourth generation, my youngest son, Wiley. With a little pride I realized I was just like my father," she says. —LP

PHOTO COURTESY OF HUMPHREY, COVILL & COLEMAN INSURANCE



# Burr Bros. Boats

MARION

Whereas other family businesses have reinvented themselves over the generations, Burr Bros. Boats found something that worked and stuck to it.

According to Tucker Burr, the third-generation owner, his family hasn't strayed far from their roots of providing boat storage and care at the head of Sippican Harbor.

Over the years, management styles haven't changed much between generations, says Burr, who works alongside his father in the boatyard.

"My dad is a great mentor and consultant and he continues to work part-time—we have a wonderful working relationship," says Burr. "It's really great to have a family member as someone who can be there to help guide and keep everything going."

And that working relationship with family followed Burr



The original founders of Burr Bros. Boats

from childhood. While some kids might have been looking to get away from their hometown, Burr spent his time learning the ropes of the family business.

"This has sort of been something that I've been doing for my entire life and I've always sort of planned on always working here," says Burr. "I grew up talking about the boatyard at home. My whole life has really just been about it. It's definitely an all-encompassing venture." —SS-P

PHOTO COURTESY OF BURR BROS. BOATS

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Brian Guimond with his daughter Kelly Mendell, who is now CEO.

## Mikel

MIDDLETOWN AND FALL RIVER

**B**rian Guimond, a 35-year electrical engineer at the Naval Undersea Warfare Center, took his knowledge and connections to launch MIKEL Inc. in 1999. When the company—known for its state-of-the-art technology in designing GPS systems for underwater submarines—began to successfully secure contracts, Guimond knew he needed help.

He turned to his daughter, Kelly Mendell, who already had established herself professionally at companies including Gillette and Raytheon after earning her bachelor's degree in industrial engineering and master's degree in business.

"I was at a crossroads in my career, trying to decide my next steps. So the opportunity was very timely. I felt very fortunate. You never know where life will take you," Mendell says.

She joined in 2002 and immersed herself in all aspects of the business, including billing, payroll, contracts, accounting, benefits, sales, marketing, and more. In 2008, she became the company's president and majority owner; her father currently is the chief technology officer.

Twenty years later, the company boasts 230 employees, including engineers, logisticians, technicians, and developers. Among these employees is Guimond's son, who joined MIKEL in 2004 and serves as director of corporate development. (The company name, MIKEL, is a composite of their two names, Michael and Kelly.)

Mendell credits her father for setting an example of positive, results-oriented leadership, and cultivating the relationships over time that set MIKEL up for success. "He leads by example. When there is a problem, he is part of the solution. That's what I've been able to take into my career; the ability to be a problem-solver."

Looking to the future, Guimond says MIKEL is in good hands. "It's time to let go. I think the company is poised to move forward with or without me. I feel confident about its future."

Mendell says she hopes the business offers many opportunities for the next generation. "My teens have seen the benefit of having your own business. They are very inspired by the mission. If someday they have a desire to work here, I hope we can provide challenging opportunities for them. My focus over time is to provide a great company, great culture, and challenging, high-paying jobs," Mendell says. —LP

Many thanks to One SouthCoast Chamber's co-CEOs Rick Kidder and Michael O'Sullivan for their guidance and suggestions in identifying the multi-generational businesses profiled here.

## Matouk Luxury Linens

FALL RIVER



(Left) George Matouk Jr. with father George Matouk Sr. (Right) Mindy Matouk, George Jr.'s wife, is the company's creative director.

**M**atouk Luxury Linens has been in business since 1929 when John Matouk left his home in Damascus, Syria for the United States. After learning about the world of fine linens in Italy and China, he set up shop in New York City with Matouk & Co.

John's descendants carried on his entrepreneurial spirit. His son, George Matouk Sr., took over the business in 1966 after his father's passing, but he didn't learn on-the-spot. George Sr. spent his summers as a teen working with and learning the ropes. During George's tenure as CEO of Matouk he moved the factory to New Bedford.

Now, George Matouk Jr., 52, who took over the business in 2002, works alongside wife and creative director Mindy Matouk to keep the family legacy alive in the 21st century. Much like his father, George Jr. joined the company in 1997 and learned along the way.

George Jr. and Mindy, whether intentionally or not, echo the dynamic of John Matouk and his wife Maude. Much like how their grandparents

before them traveled the world together to build Matouk into what it is, George and Mindy keep Matouk mobile, looking to the future to improve their trade. —SS-P

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