

Customers remain important to Cagle's owner

10 questions

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Debi Cagle, owner of Cagle's Appliance in Ontario, recently recently donated a washer and dryer to the USO at Ontario.

Cagle talks about the keys to her business noting that her parents who started this business 52 years ago played a role. The business is still very much in the family, her brother, Gary, is the service manager; her cousin Gina is the dispatcher, her aunt Bonnie handles the billing and her cousin Sharon is the controller.

Cagle, who has been operating the business for the last 20 years, said she is happy to continue the service once offered by her parents.



Cagle

Question: When did you take over for your dad?

Answer: About 21 years ago. He needed to retire so my brother Jerry and I went into partnership and about a year after that I bought my brother out.

Q. Did you ever imagine you would be running the business?

A: I was a daddy's girl but I didn't think I'd ever own my own business. I saw my parents put in the hours, they worked 24/7. When the opportunity came, that my father had this business he built from the ground up I realized the opportunity I had.

Q. Do you consider yourself a hands-on owner?

A: Yes. I'm the janitor if something needs to be cleaned and I'm in there dealing with customers if they have questions. Whatever my employees are asked to do I'm there right there with them.

Q. What has been the biggest challenge as an owner?

A: The thing that my father always taught me was that the customer is always right. The hard part was smiling and giving the customer their money back when you know you're right. When I lost my father nine years ago I had lost a good sounding board, a year after that I lost my husband in an accident. Last year my home burned up and I lost everything. My employees, customers and family is what kept me going.

Q. What did you do when you first started working for your father?

A: I started out washing used appliances. I earned every bit of this, he didn't just hand this to me. He let me make mistakes, even if it cost us money. I would ask him why he didn't tell me or warn me and he would say "If I told you wouldn't believe me." If I did it then I won't repeat the mistake.

Q. When did learn you had won the 2008 Small Business of the Year award by the chamber?

A: The Chamber of Commerce called me in August. I was very proud for all of my employees.

Q: What is the key to your success?

A: My employees are what makes this work. My father always taught me it is better to give than to receive. So I try to give back to the community and customers as much as possible.

Q: What has been your proudest moment as the owner of the company?

A: I don't think I just have one, but certainly when the business was large enough to incorporate. Also seeing my customers happy makes me happy. Receiving the 2008 Small Business of the Year award by the chamber, that was a very good moment. The recognition I get, that's all because of my employees.

Q: Who had been your biggest inspiration?

A: My father and mother. I remember growing up watching them work together, live together and raise a family together and I never saw them fight once. They were filled with love, that's probably why I am this way.

Q: Tell me something about yourself people don't know?

A: I recently bought a tractor so I've been busy learning how to operate it. I live on 10 acres and it is not an easy chore, a tractor really helps.