



Business Bloodlines

The Bruening family gets a lot of togetherness at work — where dad (and mom) works with his sons

By Bill Schlegel
Herald-Whig Staff Writer

It wasn't enough for Bruce Bruening to be in business with his wife, Sandra. He now works with his two sons.

Bruening, who owns Bruening Heating and Air Conditioning and Fireplaces in Mendon, works with sons Chad, 29, and Marty, 26.

"When they were growing up, I didn't get to see them a whole lot. I was working 12 to 14 hours a day. Actually, we're closer now than we were when they grew up," Bruening said.

Having the boys join the business was not something that was planned.

"(The boys) always said, 'We're never going in the family business. I'm not going to do what my parents do.' That type of thing," Sandra Bruening said. "I was really happy that they decided to come into it. Most moms don't have that luxury of seeing their kids every day. It's really nice. Even if it's just to see them walk in."

The Bruening boys had helped out at the business while they were growing up, so it just felt natural to come to work there full time after high school. Chad Bruening went to John Wood Community College for a semester but couldn't envision himself sitting behind a desk.

Marty Bruening also signed up for John Wood.

"About three or four weeks before he was going to go, he came up to his mother and said 'You think Dad would be mad if I went ahead and worked with you guys and went to Vatterott College?'" Bruce Bruening said.

The boys said they never felt pushed or pressured by their father to get into the family business.

"In a way he did, but not really. When we were real young we dreaded it. He'd make us go out (and help him) at night or on the weekends when we could be watching TV or doing something else," Chad Bruening said.

Bruce and Sandra Bruening, both from Quincy, have been in business together for 30 years.

Bruce Bruening went into the military after high school, then used the GI Bill to go to school at Rankin Technical College in St. Louis. He got a job in Baton Rouge, La., and was an apprentice with the union when they went on strike.

So he came back to Quincy and got a job at

Motorola. Then he met someone who needed help in the heating and air conditioner business. Bruce Bruening had an uncle who had done that type of work and had made a pretty good living at it.

Bruening worked as a helper for a couple of years before deciding to start his own business. "It's just something that you're born with, I think," he said.

The Bruenings ran the business from their home for 19 years before renting a space in Quincy. In 1995, they bought a site at 102 W. Collins in Mendon.

Of course, working with family members does have a downside.

"It's harder to get away from work. During holidays and other occasions, you talk about work," Marty Bruening said.

And working with a parent, who built the business from scratch, can be challenging.

"Sometimes it's hard to get him to change his ways, to get him to listen to us, the younger generation," Chad Bruening said. "He's done things his way. He's been the sole head for

25 years. Now we're getting to where we can make decisions.

"It's got its ups and downs. But it's got more positives than negatives. You get to see him every day, which is good and bad. Be a part of his life. We get along pretty good."

The boys also enjoy keeping the business running at a high level.

"Knowing that the business is going to keep going down the road. A lot times people go in different directions," Marty Bruening said.

Their mother said she has noticed many second- and third-generation businesses sometimes don't maintain a high standard.

"They just kind of go downhill. (The children) take it for granted because they're not the ones that worked so hard to get it where it is," she said.

"But I don't think we'll have that problem with those two," she said of her sons.

Bruce Bruening doesn't plan on retiring completely but does plan to slow down a bit.

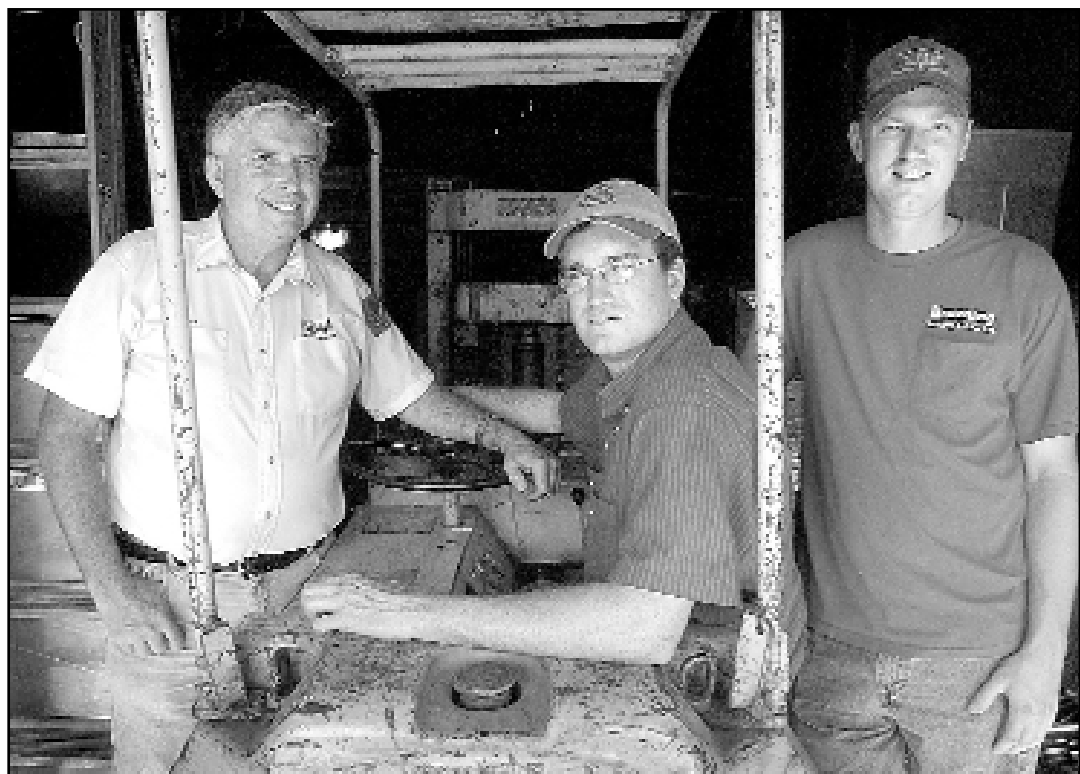
"I've turned quite a bit over to them now," he said. "It's easier now to take vacations because you know that somebody's here that really cares about the business."

Sandra Bruening doesn't plan on leaving either.

"I don't think I could ever get away from it completely because I like seeing the kids," she said.

"It's got its ups and downs. But it's got more positives than negatives. You get to see him every day, which is good and bad. Be a part of his life. We get along pretty good."

— Chad Bruening,
talking about working with his father,
Bruce Bruening



H-W Photo/Steve Bohnstedt

Bruce Bruening, left, and his two sons, Chad, center, and Marty, run Bruening Heating and Air Conditioning and Fireplaces in Mendon. Mom Sandra Bruening also is part of the family business.

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