



The Gerwe Family

RES ACCESSORIES, TAMPA, FLORIDA

RES Accessories' father-and-son leadership team demonstrates success that's all in the details

By Kristen Card

I did a lot of due diligence," Mike Gerwe Jr. says, referring to his life-changing decision to accept a sales/marketing position with RES Accessories (www.resacc.com) in 1994. "I talked with about eight close friends who were involved in [that sort of] business and the word was, it was either something that would work really, really well, or it would be terrifically challenging."

Mike elected to join RES and fortunately, it's worked really, really well—mostly due to the longtime, close relationship he shared with the company's owner—his dad, Mike Gerwe Sr.

"We're quite close, so I knew it would probably work favorably," Mike Jr. acknowledges. What he might not have guessed is just how his entrance into the family business would ultimately turn RES into the rent-to-own industry's go-to vendor for all the little things that help them create big success.

RES Accessories offers about 2,000 different items that support rent-to-own products, covering several categories: appliance accessories, such as dryer/range connectors or clamps; computer accessories, like replacement keyboards and mice or cables; electronics accessories—universal remote controls, batteries, etc.; refurbishment/cleaning accessories, such as furniture polish or leather cleaner; and warehouse accessories—appliance carts, furniture pads, etc.

"When Mike Jr. came into the company, we were carrying about 30 to 40 accessories for rent-to-own and servicing about 100 stores," Mike Sr. remembers. "He saw an opportunity and became very involved in APRO, TRIB Group, state [rental dealer] associations and with individual rent-to-own stores as cus-

tomers; rental-purchase has been the bulk of our business ever since. We provide stores and chains with real one-stop shopping for items they might have had to go to as many as 15 or 20 different vendors for before."

Today, Mike Jr. serves as RES Accessories' president and CEO, the company services about 145 rent-to-own companies representing about 3,000 storefronts nationwide and this niche business is saving its customers more than just considerable cash.

"Our biggest competitor is local procurement," Mike Jr. notes, "when [store personnel] pull money from the cash drawer and run up to Lowe's or the corner hardware store at the last minute, spend three times the money for a dryer cord, on company time/payroll/insurance, using the company truck and they're not in the store serving customers. They can customize a program through us and we ship same-day—the intrinsic savings, beyond just the cost of the items, become extremely clear."

Indeed, the Gerwes say their goal is to do whatever they can to make their customers' jobs and lives easier.

"The single most important lesson we've learned is to listen," says Mike Sr. "Let the customers come to you and tell you exactly what they need. If you've got an open mind and you listen to what they're saying to you, then you'll have incredible opportunities presented to you."

"We work to understand what their business is all about," Mike Jr. seconds. "I try to take all of our personnel to rent-to-own stores individually, to see how they operate, what their daily life's about and how we can help them. We see the amazing one-on-one personal relationships

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they've developed with their customers and by being there, we're building the same sort of working relationship with them."



The Gerwes' approach to their own business mirrors those close connections. Originally launched by Mike Sr., and his wife, Joyce (they'll celebrate their golden anniversary next summer), RES now employs a tight-knit, cross-trained "family" of 15, led by what Mike

Jr. calls "an extraordinary management team." Mike Sr., sidling toward retirement, today holds the official title of company chairman. His son honors the important role his father still plays within the business by calling him "Guide."

"I've had no problem whatsoever in letting go of responsibility and transferring it to [Mike Jr.] from day one," Mike Sr. says, "because we've always been so in-sync in how we think, work and deal with the challenges we face daily. We've already concluded a succession plan—and it isn't an end, it's a new beginning. We've successfully gotten here without missing a beat and we intend to be around a long, long time." ✧

Kristen Card is a freelance business writer based in Austin, Texas.



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Shewmake FROM PAGE 23

walk off the job, and you can always count on them," Shewmake only half-jokes.



All joking aside, the disciplined, detail-oriented Shewmake revels in the methodical nature of his number-crunching—and marvels at his good fortune in finding the ideal combination for a successful career—in rent-to-own, or anywhere.

"You've got to find work you like to do and people you like working with," quips Shewmake. "And if you can find a company that will let you grow and develop into your full potential, then that's the best." ✧

Gughiocello FROM PAGE 25

"I literally have to forbid him to work seven days a week," Spangle says. "He's not ignoring his kids—they're with him.



It's just what he loves to do. The people coming in and out of the store, they're his family. So if I tell him he can't go to work, then I'm telling him he can't go to family."

Though Spangle frets about burnout, Gughiocello—going into his 20th year in rent-to-own—says Spangle himself has been vital to his friend's staying power.

"Keeping it fresh has a lot to do with who you work for," Gughiocello explains. "I think burnout comes not from just being somewhere, but from not enjoying your job and who you work for. I really enjoy dealing with people, and John and I work well together. I really owe my success to my family—my kids first and foremost: Anthony, Michael and Katie—as well as my family in rent-to-own." ✧

Adams FROM PAGE 27

Which is how a rent-to-own career—with more than three decades at the same company—stays fresh for Adams. But beneath the ever-changing daily work landscape, he credits three essential elements with his rent-to-own success and stamina: a solid work ethic, a positive attitude and a deep caring for his business and its people.



"I treat the stores and the company like I'm part of it," Adams says. "When I spend company money, I feel like it's my own money. I feel like the more successful the stores are, the more successful I am. I always treat it like it's my business as much as anybody's business. I feel like part of a family." ✧