

TRIBUNE-REVIEW

Like father, like sons

By Leann Junker
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Hard work. Family. Pride. Loyalty. Sacrifice. Humility.

These are some of the principles Jack LaCarte learned from his father and instilled in his own five sons.

"If you go back to the early days of the Mon Valley -- I mean way back -- families lived on the hillside and the factories were here down along the river and the siblings would grow up and they would move four or five blocks away and start their family, and I guess we're typical of that kind of upbringing," LaCarte said. "Certainly my mother and dad were part of that. I was fortunate enough to have an exposure to people who weathered the Depression and they knew about work and they knew about saving."

LaCarte, 62, of Rostraver Township, said he listened to the stories people told him about how they survived those hard times by working together and sharing what they had.

"Maybe some of that rubbed off on me," he said. "I believe that's how to get through life, with everybody pulling together. That's what I try to do."

Twenty years ago, LaCarte purchased Model Cleaners, a dry cleaning and uniform business which operates in a warehouse that dates back to 1891 when it served as the site for Hussey-Binns Shovel Works. Since he started the business, all five of his sons have joined him.

"As they got out of college, one by one, they came back here to work," LaCarte said. "They all have their own unique abilities and they all work in those areas."

John, 39, serves as president; Mike, 38, is general manager of the dry cleaning division; Dave, 37, is sales manager of uniform rental; Joe, 34, is general manager of uniform operations; and Dan, 25, is general manager of the retail store operations.

"Being able to work with them in business is not something that all fathers are able to do, and I feel very, very fortunate that I've been able to do that," Jack LaCarte said.

In addition to working together, the LaCartes also gather on most Sundays for a family dinner and they take a vacation together for a week in July at Deep Creek, Md.

"I didn't know where the boys were going to finally settle, and I wanted to create a situation where at least one week a year they were going to know that we would have a family gathering," LaCarte said. "What we try to do is sort of stop the music for a week and get together and relax and enjoy the lake and the mountains."

Today, the family will gather at Jack and Mary LaCarte's home in Rostraver Township. In all, there will be 21 of them, including Jack's 92-year-old mother, Emma, who prepares the meal with Jack's wife. All the sons



are married with children with the exception of Dan LaCarte, who is planning to be married next summer.

It's also likely that Jack LaCarte's sister, Jill Kusic, of Hempfield Township, will come over with her husband, Sam, and their grown children.

"We live in the country, so there's room to run a little bit and if the weather is nice, we'll play some sort of a game and involve the little ones in it," Jack LaCarte said. "The focus is on the nine grandchildren."

Although it is Father's Day, Jack LaCarte said it won't stick out as any different than any other day for him. "Father's Day for me is every day. I am so grateful and blessed."

In the 1940s, Jack LaCarte worked with his father, John J., who was the founder and owner of Lock-Fold Paper Box Co. in Charleroi.

"That's all I ever wanted to do when I got out of college was to go and work with him," Jack LaCarte said. "He taught me the principle of hard work. He taught me to be loyal to the people who work for you and with you and people around you. He taught me to be humble and grateful that I was born and raised in America."

John J. LaCarte died suddenly at the age of 72 in 1984.

John LaCarte, who was 17 at the time, remembers his grandfather fondly. "He made me feel special and therefore I believed I was."

A native of Monessen, John J. LaCarte was once a Westmoreland County Commissioner and served in leadership roles in the Mon Valley. He stressed hard work and family, John LaCarte said.

"The reason we got into the farming business is because he saw farming as a way for the family to be able to work together," said John LaCarte, explaining his family bought a farm in Ligonier and then a cattle farm in Indiana, Pa., that they later sold in 1980 to move back to the Mon Valley.

John LaCarte said they made the decision to get into the dry cleaning and uniform business for the sake of their family.

"The business allowed us to keep the family together," John LaCarte said. "That was the intention of why we got into the business and started the business."

Dan LaCarte said he is proud to work with his family. "It's a matter of opportunity I think. The opportunity presented itself. It certainly was never required. My older brothers built this business and I am very fortunate to be a part of it coming out of college."

"The reason we've been successful in our business," Mike LaCarte said, "is because of how our dad raised us. Our grandfather and our dad used to get up every day of the year ... and go to work Monday through Sunday (on the cattle farm). They gave us a very strong work ethic.

"It's that work ethic that he instilled in all of us that allowed us to do what it takes to be successful in business -- that's not an easy thing," Mike LaCarte said. "My dad is the best man I know -- no doubt about it."

Joe LaCarte added that his family endured hard times along the way.

"It wasn't always rosy," he said. "When we were kids, we were on a farm that wasn't doing well and we lost a little brother." Thomas LaCarte died at 11 months of age.

"He took us through a lot of hard times, but he was strong through it all," Joe LaCarte said. "I remember

those times. They were sad times and hard times, but he still kept us focused on doing what was right."

Dave LaCarte agreed. "As we were growing up, he was always talking to us. He was always trying to deliver the message of try to do the right thing. Growing up you don't want to listen to those things and sometimes even now I don't want to hear those things, but he doesn't relent. He just keeps driving that message home in hopes that one day it will stick."

Dave LaCarte said he didn't always appreciate the preaching then, but he does now.

He also remembers his father's attitude toward sports. Jack LaCarte would tell the coach: "If these guys ever become a problem for you, they don't have to play. They'll go back and work."

"He said, 'Don't give the coach a problem because this is just a privilege,'" Dave LaCarte recalled. "'You're not there to be the star, you're just there to learn the life lessons of being a part of a team and exercise and keeping yourself busy.'"

Dan LaCarte holds dear a handwritten letter from his dad that he received before his last home game when he was playing football for Pitt.

The team was facing the Miami Hurricanes, said Dan LaCarte, who played offensive guard and was going up against a much bigger player. "He wrote, 'Remember you're a LaCarte and you're tough. You can take this guy who's 360 pounds.' He just gave me the confidence to really take this guy down."

As a way to focus on his goals during games, Dan LaCarte said he wrote "Dad," "Mom" and all the names of his brothers on his wrist.

"When times got tough in the game and the crowd was getting intense, I'd always look down at my brothers and my dad and my mom and it gave me an inspiration," Dan LaCarte said. "He's always been there for me."

When it comes to business, the six men don't always see eye to eye.

"We have different opinions and that's a good thing. We challenge each other," Mike LaCarte said.

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