

EXECUTIVE SUITE



Photo by Terry Scott Reed

Stratton D. Yatron, CFO of Adelphi Kitchens & Cabinetry Inc.

By Terry Scott Reed

For Stratton Yatron, CFO of Adelphi Kitchens and Cabinetry, there was never the youthful thought of becoming a fireman. "It was always assumed I'd take a place here in the family business, and I was always fine with that." He took his place in the company in 1987 and was named CFO in 1993.

Some folks can't seem to work for (or with) a relative, but if Yatron had that problem, it'd be a whopper: his father, the business co-founder, ninety-one years old and officially retired for some time now, still reports to work daily! "I am like my father in many ways. I can be more laid back at times, but it drives me to get things done and off my plate!" Yatron's uncle is the other co-founder, and there are numerous other Yatrons involved in the business.

Yatron is married to his high school sweetheart and prom date, Susan. They attended different colleges, sort of: he has a bachelor's in business administration and economics from Albright, and Susan, an accountant, attended Sara Lawrence (but later also had the Albright experience—that's where her accounting degree came from).

Yatron has participated in the growth of Adelphi, which is headquartered and has its only facility in Robesonia. The company has always been family-owned—Stratton's father and uncle began it in a garage. The current factory is 160,000 square feet. The company distributes its custom-made kitchens and cabinets nationally. It was begun in 1946 and employs 120 to produce cabinets for a network of some 200 active dealers. (There are 15 walnut display cases crafted by Adelphi located in the U. S. Capitol rotunda, displaying presidential memorabilia.)

The family includes two boys, one 9 and one 11. (Yatron said the kids are a little young to show any career inclinations, but notes their different personalities. "One is book smart, the other is street smart.") They enjoy a vacation home in San Juan, Puerto Rico, and they try to visit frequently, even if just for a long weekend. They found Puerto Rico quite accidentally. "Right around the time of the Iraq war's beginning, we were scheduled to fly to Heathrow. I didn't want to expose the kids to a high-alert situation there, with military guarding the airport and such, so at the last minute, we sought out alternative destinations. We ended up in Puerto Rico and really liked it." The family finds a way for seven or eight trips a year. There's a good connection from Philadelphia International, and the seats on the plane have individual TV screens, so the kids remain entertained while airborne.

Kitchen Worker

Stratton Yatron: Crafting cupboards at Adelphi

A more everyday local activity might include a trip to Philadelphia. Susan is on the board of the Reading Symphony Orchestra, so trips to the Kimmel Center for concerts make for a special evening, especially when combined with dinner at Lacroix or Estia restaurants. (Re Estia: "excellent lamb!") Stratton enjoys golfing but finds his time spent on the links to be "not nearly enough." He was a swimmer when he attended Wilson High School, and he still swims several times a week as a pleasurable way of exercising.

While he worked summers in the factory, he also worked at other things when he was still in school, including a stint at Kay Jewelers at the Fairgrounds Square Mall. Like many "bosses sons," he feels he has experienced all of the worst jobs the factory has to offer, just so his father could demonstrate his impartiality.

He believes there are a lot of "good things" going on in Berks. "The Berks Economic Partnership, the Greater Reading Chamber [and others] are doing a great job marketing the area." Stratton likes the centrality of Berks County for the business and for the family. It's the proximity to cultural activities in Berks, Philadelphia, New York, and other places that pleases the family man and father in him, while the businessman likes the distribution channels and the local work force. Adelphi enjoys a very low employee turnover rate. "Some of our staff has been with us since the sixties." While some of the work is becoming more technical, the company has had no problem attracting all of the qualified applicants it seeks.

Stratton sees a number of challenges for the company but notes that much of

it—the economy and the housing market, as examples—is beyond his individual control. The company by its nature is somewhat insulated because it deals in a custom, high-end product that tends to be recession-resistant if not recession-proof. "If we must, we can put out specials, say, cherry wood at no upgrade charge to stimulate orders. Housing downturns also tend to stimulate home improvement upswings, and kitchens are a favorite project, so one thing offsets another here."

On the manufacturing side, the company has applied some lean manufacturing techniques but finds that those principals can't be applied across the board. "It can take a long time to get a substandard shipment of wood replaced, so we have to go deeper on inventory there and avoid just-in-time shipments because a problem there can shut you down."

The company has always placed high emphasis on quality, and one of the ways he keeps tabs on things is by selling the product to friends and acquaintances and then following up with them for feedback and any suggestions for improvement. "We have an attitude thing. A typical custom order for us turns around in 4 to 6 weeks. The industry standard is 6 to 8 weeks and can go to 20 with some manufacturers. We find that we can deliver high quality and fast turnaround, and that is a competitive advantage."

Stratton doesn't foresee any company expansions to other geographic areas for their manufacturing operations. Robesonia suits just fine, and Mexico, offshoring, NAFTA, even a U.S. located satellite plant hold no current allure

for Adelphi. But turnaround is fair play: The company is actively pursuing export sales to China, as their emerging economy is creating a middle-class demand for products like his. One big advantage that Adelphi has over many others is that one of their existing product lines is a European-style cabinet that has always been produced only in metric sizes, giving the company a big head start on Chinese ordering preferences and requirements. Actual shipment of product is probably about 2 years away.

In the meantime, he is focusing on infilling dealers between his Robesonia plant and the company's most distant dealers. "We have dealers in the northwest—Washington—but are less well represented in, say, Michigan, Ohio, or Idaho." He'd like to do more business in the South, too but there is a perception problem holding back many cabinet companies: "In the South, say, below Virginia and north of Florida, there is a common consumer perception that a quality cabinet can only be built 'in place.'"

Yatron is a proud Republican, but he has no aspirations to a political career. He doesn't want to contribute to what he sees as over-representation. "PA Congress should be half the size it presently is, and there should be term limits. We have too many career politicians who are more concerned about re-election and retirement."

He helps his wife with matters of the Reading Symphony Orchestra, and he's a member of Philadelphia's Union League and serves on their Youth Work Committee, which supports over 200 youth organizations. He's been on the board of the Berkshire Country Club since 2006 and was involved in the Reading-Berks Habitat for Humanity organization. He's on the board of National Penn Bank and, nationally, the Kitchen Manufacturer's Association. He also has served on the South Heidelberg Township Planning Commission.

Yatron recommends that young folks obtain a well-rounded education, not just in business or finance, but including English literature and history. He leads by example: He graduated from high school having already completed a year of college-level work, and he worked 3 days a week during his senior year at Albright.

Stratton demonstrates that you can work hard and still have a fulfilling family and cultural life, one not defined solely by your job or work. A balanced education lays the groundwork for a broad appreciation of the opportunities that hard work and success can bring, and community involvement intensifies and enriches all other experiences.