

Southern Rebuilder Makes Big Investments

By Traci Matt
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

When most rebuilders brag about their investments, they typically are referring to state-of-the-art diagnostic tools, an upgraded service bay, or a new computer network. For Danny Wilson, owner of Wilson Starter and Alternator Service, Inc., in Minden, La., the focus of much of his time and money is his flesh and blood.

"I have to be honest with you," he said, "my number one investment for the last 10 years has been my children."

Wilson's firstborn, Jamie, has a mammoth list of academic, public service, and pageant accomplishments. Most notably, she is the current Miss Louisiana and will be competing for the title of Miss America at the end of this month. She is an honors student who completed high school at age 16, and was accepted into law school at age 20.

Wilson said his participation in Jamie's pageant career has involved more than writing checks for travel, coaches and evening gowns. He has also made an effort to support Jamie in time-intensive ways such as training. Before the Miss Louisiana competition last spring, he ran stadium steps with her for an hour a day.

"I've never been in better shape in my life," he said. "There's a lot more that goes into this than people realize. They have to be up on current events and they do a lot of reading and preparing, besides

working on their talent and getting their bodies in shape. Our philosophy has always been if something is worth doing it's worth working really hard for."

Jamie's platform revolves around raising public awareness of dyspraxia, a little-known disability defined as "the inability of one's senses to respond efficiently to outside stimuli." One in 20 children suffers from this under-diagnosed disorder, including her 19-year-old brother Borden.

Borden was diagnosed at age 4, but through early intervention and a healthy dose of determination has risen to academic and athletic excellence. He was class salutatorian in high school and currently skis for the University of Alabama water ski team.

"We have a real success story," said Wilson, "He is Jamie's inspiration for promoting awareness of dyspraxia. It's a cause that's near and dear to our hearts."

Middle son Tomlin also skis for the university and has won numerous individual national water skiing titles.

Wilson said his wife of 26 years, Melinda, keeps them all "on the right track."

"Her work ethic and organization skills are what I consider to be the driving force that holds everything together," he said.

Wilson traces his rebuilding roots to his grandfather who opened a shop in Rolla, Mo. in 1952. In 1966 his father and grandfather started Wilson Starter and Generator in Natchitoches, La. He worked in that business while attending college, and then opened his current business in Minden in 1978.

"We are a small company with four

full-time rebuilders, three of which have been with me for 20 years or more. I still call on a few long time customers myself, but I mostly stay in the office and manage the daily operations of our business," said Wilson. "My brother Tim, who has been my partner for 22 years, sees 80 percent of our largest customers on a weekly basis. The knowledge and personal service he provides is a major reason why most of our clients have continued to patronize us for most of the last 20 years.

"We very seldom lose customers," he said. "Everyone has some problems, but it's how you handle those problems that separate those that are successful from those that aren't. I guess the same competitive spirit that makes you a success in sports makes you a success in business."

Wilson's customers are primarily oil field-related companies, as well as some large trucking companies. Fully 90 percent of their business is heavy-duty.

"As this industry has changed, we have changed our strategies. Where we used to sell almost 100 percent rebuilt products, now we sell about 50 percent new products. This allows us to continue to increase sales without adding on new inexperienced rebuilders."

Another new diversification tactic they have employed is adding a rent-to-own auto lot for those who can't finance automobiles through traditional routes. Wilson said this is an additional "full time business" and they currently have 150 cars in the pipeline. He employs a mechanic and a body shop technician in this endeavor, but said it doesn't take up much room because the inventory is



It's a family affair at Wilson Starter and Alternator Service where most employees and patrons have stuck with them for some twenty years. Employees pictured here (l to r) are Danny's brother and business partner Tim Wilson, Pattie Stanley, owner Danny Wilson, Mike Dickson and Les Humphrey.



A good employer is as hard to find as good employees. That's why these folks have hung around for so long. Shown here (l to r) are rebuilders DeWayne Dick, Brian Basinger, Mark Willis and RB Page.

“rolling around out there.”

Wilson said being self-employed has made it easier for him to be an active part of his children’s above-average accomplishments.

“It does allow me to get away for three or four days at a time,” he said. “My

employees are great and cell phones have really been the secret. I can still do a lot of business while we’re traveling.”

When asked what it’s like to be the father of Miss Louisiana, the articulate and talkative Wilson was at a loss for words.

“I swell with pride,” he said finally.

Miss America 2007 will be crowned live on CMT, Monday, January 29. You can bet there will be one proud papa from Louisiana in the audience.

Go to www.dyspraxiaawareness.com or www.jamieleawilson.com for more information.



All is well at Wilson Starter and Alternator in Minden, La., where the men are strong, the women are good-looking, and all the children are above average.



From rebuilding roots to Miss Louisiana, the Wilsons are a fine example of what family is all about. Together at the Miss Louisiana Pageant are (l to r) son Borden, wife Melinda, daughter Jamie, Danny Wilson and son Tomlin.