

## All In The Family Business

They say, "like father, like son", but when it comes to business, the younger generations of Jamaican entrepreneurial families have chosen to chase more elaborate ambitions in lieu of adhering to family-tradition—adding cutting-edge appeal and diversity to compete in the modern market.

Simply put, these present-day moguls have elevated the "Mom and Pop" approach to family business in Jamaica, allowing their respective companies to enjoy economies of scale while still observing the virtues on which the entities were founded.

"If you ask my father what's his profession, to this day, he'd tell you he's a baker," says hotelier Kevin Hendrickson of his formally-trained-engineer father, Karl, who for years operated Jamaica's sliced bread pioneer National Continental Bakery before purchasing Courtleigh Manor Hotel and later Knutsford Court in Kingston.

For the Hendrickson family, the transition from baking to hospitality was simply serendipitous, since the acquisition of the Courtleigh was more of a real estate investment rather than an attempt to seriously enter the hospitality industry.



MARK FLETCHER WITH HIS FATHER JOHN

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"The Courtleigh really facilitated our introduction into the hospitality industry," explains Hendrickson, the third of four children, who was named general manager of the new Courtleigh nearly 10 years ago. "Then later, we had to create an atmosphere that would cater to the business-savvy and Knutsford was perfect for that."

Today, both hotels maintain steady occupancy levels of 80 per cent, due in part to the hotels' business-oriented technology additions, namely the corporate centre and the wireless Internet access installed in 2004.

The Hendricksons now also operate several hotels across the island, including the Sunset Jamaica Grande in Ocho Rios and the Sunset Beach Resort in Montego Bay. It's a far cry from the bread-making of the elder Hendricksons,



KEVIN HENDRICKSON

but the younger Hendrickson says his generation's hospitality ventures were built on the same foundations that made Yummy Bread and Wholesome Bakery a true Jamaican success story.

"The (new) business had a regular corporate structure, but what my mother and father were able to do is work along with the staff to pass on certain fundamental values," he added.

But while baker-hotelier Hendrickson,

as "GM" would perhaps be too busy to oversee the nitty-gritty details such as bed-making process daily, Aswad Morgan, Group Marketing Manager of Morgans Group of Companies does—literally.

He is set to inherit the leadership of The Morgans Group—started in 1974 with Morgans Industries, manufacturing solid mahogany furniture—from dad Kenneth.

Throughout its early years, Morgans supplied the island's major furniture retailers including Courts and Singer Jamaica, while maintaining a presence in all 14 parishes. The business expanded in the decades that followed, as the company established Polyflex Foam (polyurethane foam plant) and Jumbolon Jamaica Limited, which produces polyethylene foam, in 1982 and 1995 respectively.

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Like most Jamaican manufacturers in the late 1980s and early 90s, the Morgans were faced with the harsh reality of competing with global manufacturers. But instead of folding up and pursuing other ventures, the family began to think inwards, and diversified its operations when it formed Therapeutic Caribbean Limited, and began manufacturing Therapeutic mattresses locally.

"We were deeply integrated into manufacturing and well-connected to the furniture industry, so we started [operating under] Therapeutic International which is among the top five largest bedding manufacturers in the world," said Morgan.

The transformation from mahogany to bedding was a true family



THE MORGANS: KENNETH, ASWAD, NAYO AND JOYCELIN

undertaking, he notes, adding that the youngest of the three siblings Nayo, played a pivotal role in fueling the venture. In 2000, the group scored a major coup when Spanish hoteliers contracted Morgans to supply approximately 850 beds for the Riu

the most advanced bedding material available today, and will be placed in guest rooms when the resort's renovation is completed.

Like Hendrickson, Morgan, who became officially involved with the group in 1995, credits his structural

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engineer father and registered nurse mother for laying the foundations of the business, but points out that it was his generation that decided to take a bullish approach in reinventing, expanding and aggressively marketing the group's products.

"Nayo and I took the opportunity to re-establish Morgans within the industry with new blood, new energy, new drive...we took our focus and vision into all areas of the business."

The US\$6 million invested in state-of-the-art bedding manufacturing machinery, Morgan hopes, will allow Morgans to easily expand into other Caribbean markets.

"We really focus a lot on quality, with that you'll have longevity and that's something my parents always emphasized," Morgan reflected.

Branding, it seems, is also the defining factor for Mark Fletcher of Country Traders Limited, distributors of Jamaica's rare and very expensive Blue Mountain Coffee.

"I started my brand in 1991...I felt that if I had my own brand I could do a better job [of distributing coffee]," Fletcher shares.

He learnt a thing or two about business from his entrepreneurial dad who ran his own manufacturing plant, specializing in bottled sauces and seasoning production as principal of Fletcher Boeman Limited. At the height of Jamaica's economic struggles in the 1990s, the senior Fletcher sold the business before taking the position of managing director at local coffee manufacturer Salada Foods.

But as one Fletcher closed business, the other ventured out, building a business from scratch with guidance from his father. Eventually, after retiring from Salada, the elder Fletcher joined his son in building the new business.

"We roast, select green beans, do the cupping and distribution on our own," says the coffee manufacturer, pointing out that much of the sales are facilitated by the business' strong online presence. "The website brings in much of the export business...each year we get new customers," Fletcher shares. Arguably, the online sales feature initially set Country Traders apart from competitors; with the ability to directly access the international market, Fletcher found a virtually untapped market for the one of island's most famous exports.

Last year, with over 200 local customers and a steady stream of internet orders, Country Traders sales were in excess of \$100 million with a 10 per cent profit margin to boot.

Fletcher chalks his success up to the firm values no doubt gleaned from his dad.

"We've been in the market long enough to build good relationships with our customers, and our products are quality."

And how instrumental is his dad to the organization's progression?

"He's semi-retired—not young—and it's his time to enjoy life," Fletcher says. "He doesn't need to do much, but he still comes in regularly and assists me. He's there whenever I need help." ●