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Family roots run deep

By Erin Bustay Beaven

LONG ISLAND, N.Y.—Even the ordinary days are extraordinary for Brian Finkelstein.

He finds that every day is part of something bigger, something more significant than a single career or even a lifetime of success.

That's because at Max Finkelstein Inc. every day is about family. Every moment is about a legacy—about continuing something that was started more than 97 years ago, and turning it into something that makes the entire family proud.

“The business started in 1919 with my great-grandfather and his brother, and has since been growing, adapting and developing throughout each generation,” Mr. Frinkelstein, 28-year-old vice president of sales and purchasing, told *Tire Business*. He represents the fourth generation of Finkelstein family members committed to growing and preserving the family business.

It's a task he doesn't take lightly.

“Our slogan—'Family owned and operated since 1919'—is branded everywhere. I know it isn't too common anymore, especially at our size,” he said.

From its inception, every facet of the Long Island-based wholesaler's existence has been about not only the necessity to provide for the family but a commitment to service and quality.

Brian Finkelstein has grown up in those rich soils whose roots are in a business plan developed by Harry Finkelstein, father of Max Finkelstein. Harry provided for his family by using a horse and wagon to collect junk, which would be sorted for scrap metal and sold for extra cash. That—along with the money made from selling fruit at New York's Washington Market on weekends—helped to support the family back in the early days.

An accident took the life of the Finkelstein family's patriarch, so at the age of 15, Max Finkelstein took over his father's business and used the horse and wagon to collect scrap tires and metal.

When World War I came to a close, the scrap metal market fell apart, but Max remained determined. He took the few scrap tires he had collected to a wholesaler in Manhattan and had them adjusted for new tires.

That's when he entered the tire business.

In 1919, Max Finkelstein began selling both new and used tires, and the business that would bear his name was born. As a man in his mid-20s, he would travel the roads searching for new customers, while his 16-year-old brother, Irving Finkelstein, worked at the family's store, selling and mounting tires.

Together, the brothers built the business, doing everything they could to ensure inventory the customers wanted—even if it meant taking the elevated train into Manhattan to purchase tires they didn't have in stock and returning to mount them immediately for customers.

One might say it was a precursor to today's “hotshot,” within-hours deliveries that many distributors strive to achieve.

By 1927, the still-growing business was moved to a newly built building on land where the Finkelstein family's home and stable once stood.

When the Great Depression hit, the dealership was slammed. In an effort to keep the business afloat, Max shrunk it by dropping bad accounts while building a solid foundation with good-paying customers.

Over the years the business has weathered tough economic times. It continues to grow today, as several generations of Finkelstein family members—grandparents, children, cousins, siblings and in-laws—work together to ensure that the integrity of the business is not compromised.

“Our family is close-knit and in constant communication,” Brian Finkelstein said about the operations of the company today. “We have three of the four generations working together.”

Throughout its 97-year history, the company's philosophy has remained unchanged. Max Finkelstein made it clear that his business was dedicated to fast service and a strict code of ethics. Everyone within the organization was to ensure that the customer is the most important person in the business—and that nothing should ever be too small to be ignored, the younger Mr. Finkelstein said.

Those remain the guiding principals of business, and they're the same principals Brian Finkelstein said he is committed to upholding.

“Twenty years from now,...I'm sure the industry landscape will be different, but I'm confident that our company will have the same virtues that we live by, despite the continued growth and expansion,

“Who knows, maybe a fifth generation could be in training by that time,” he added.