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Meet the Millers

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Strong Foundation Leads to Family Success

Article Lisa Allen | Photography Brian Turner

When asked what advice she would give to other aspiring entrepreneurs, Laurie says “Do your research! You are responsible for every aspect of that business. There will be more to deal with than you will be able to think about.”

There’s a common parenting mantra that reminds parents that, in order to raise healthy and happy children, they must provide them with both roots and wings. Spend any time with the Miller family of Leawood, though, and one might think that wise old adage applies not only to parenting but to family, business and the measure of success.

Shawn and Laurie Miller met at the pool, when they both swam year-round for the KC Blazers. A native of Blue Springs, Shawn attended Blue Springs High School. Laurie’s family relocated from New Jersey to Kansas City when she was 13 to accommodate her father’s promotion with AT&T. Laurie later graduated from the University of Missouri in Kansas City with a degree in finance, while Shawn studied psychology at the University of Missouri in Columbia.

Shawn grew up working in his mom and dad’s dry cleaning business. The family built a rich history of entrepreneurship in Kansas City; Shawn’s father owned a Dodge/Chrysler dealership in Harrisonville with his father, and Shawn’s grandfather owned and operated a successful Ford implement business, also in Harrisonville.

Laurie’s family shared a similar history of business acumen. Laurie’s grandfather was a builder and developed many of the suburbs of Buffalo, New York, and her mother, while

still in Kansas City, is active in the business even at her current age of 69. The family still owns a hotel in St. Croix that was built by her grandfather in the late 1960s.

“We both grew up with the virtues of success in a family business around us,” says Laurie. She worked for a brokerage firm after graduating college, but decided with Shawn that they could work together and enjoy a more flexible schedule if they purchased a business together. That resulted in the couple purchasing the dry cleaning business from Shawn’s parents.

In business for 83 years, Ross Miller Cleaners operates on the principles they’ve espoused since the beginning: delivering only the best quality dry cleaning services and doing it right the first time, every time. With their same day service, drive-through option and guaranteed quality they have cultivated a loyal client base that trusts them not only with laundry but with precious furs, garment storage, leather cleaning, wedding gown cleaning and preservation and professional services for medical lab coats and uniforms.

With more than 30 employees, a plant in midtown Kansas City and locations in Blue Springs and Lee’s Summit, Laurie says that even with 21 years of experience under her belt she learns something new every day. When asked what

advice she would give to other aspiring entrepreneurs, she says “Do your research! You are responsible for every aspect of that business. There will be more to deal with than you will be able to think about.”

Laurie handles the management and customer service of the stores in Blue Springs and Lee’s Summit, pickup and delivery services as well as the bookkeeping and advertising duties. Shawn takes care of everything at the plant including the plant employees, quality, equipment maintenance and upgrades, production and customer service at the front counter.

Acknowledging that their plant is located in a rougher area of town, Laurie admits that there were theft issues until about six years ago when they adopted a guard dog for the plant. “We haven’t had a problem since!” she says.

Laurie shares that in a family business it is vital to realize that success is not always measured by money. “The relationships you build with family, employees, vendors and customers can be even more rewarding,” she says. The business has thrived in part because of these relationships, but also because of their ability to adapt to customer’s needs.

“Back in the 1920s, a delivery truck would come to your home and pick up your cleaning and deliver it back in a few days. Now that people are busy and time is such a fragile commodity, we pick up clothes at our customer’s doorsteps and deliver them back in a few days.” With an all-star client roster that includes the costumes for the Kansas City Repertory Theater and UMKC Theater, the uniforms of the Blue Springs Police Department, Oak Grove Police Department, Central Jackson County Fire Protection, Blue Springs and Lee’s summit schools, the team at Ross Miller Cleaners gives

the same attention to the clothes of thousands of other customer’s clothes throughout Jackson and Johnson counties. The family hopes to open a location in the south Leawood or Overland Park area in the near future.

But life isn’t just about business for the Miller family. “Our hobbies mostly revolve around work,” says Laurie, “but I also enjoy gardening, reading and going to the gym. Shawn likes to do triathlons and has done Ironman competitions in Kansas, Cancun and St. Croix as well as the US Half Ironman in Smithville. Even so, we both most enjoy making sure that things are running smoothly in our business. That consumes most of our free time.”

Shawn and Laurie have two children. Shawn Ross is a sophomore at Kansas State University and will be transferring to the University of Kansas next semester, where he will major in Entrepreneurship. Paige graduated from Blue Valley North in December and will complete a semester at Johnson County Community College before heading to the University of Kansas for its pre-pharmacy program.

“Both kids were into premiere soccer growing up, and we thoroughly enjoyed being soccer parents,” says Laurie. “We were also very involved in country club swimming with our kids at Loch Lloyd.”

This past August, Shawn and Laurie celebrated their 25th wedding anniversary in Jamaica, the same place they honeymooned, and recently enjoyed a stay at the very hotel that Laurie’s grandfather built in St. Croix, proving that with hard work and dedication, both business and family can at once have strong roots and wings. ♪

Learn more about Ross Miller Cleaners at RossMillerCleaners.com.

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