

Calvin Wellons - written for Carteret Business Magazine

Entrepreneurs are often forced to choose between logging long hours building their fledgling businesses or spending time with their families. Calvin Wellons, a visionary real estate developer and philanthropist who helped transform Morehead City into a thriving community, was no ordinary entrepreneur.

Mr. Wellons, who died from cancer last year, tallied an impressive list of professional accomplishments during his career. In addition to the many properties he developed, including Morehead Plaza and Beaufort Town Apartments, Mr. Wellons also served on the Morehead City Council and as President of the Morehead City Rotary, sat on the Emmanuel College Board of Education for 23 years, and with his wife, Jean, established the Wellons Foundation, an organization dedicated to helping men and women, who otherwise couldn't afford college, further their education.

Mr. Wellons and his brothers were also responsible for securing the funds to erect Emmanuel College's Wellons Science Resource Center. Randy Martin, Morehead's City Manager, also credits Mr. Wellons with helping to build Morehead City's financial stability, while Mr. Wellons' friend and business associate, Joe Beam, believes Mr. Wellons "was instrumental in expanding the city limits of Morehead City, taking them to the outlying areas," he said.

But, Mr. Wellons' legacy, which will certainly live on in Carteret County far into the future, goes far beyond his professional and philanthropic accomplishments. Talk to anyone who knows Mr. Wellons – whether professional associates or his daughters Gaye and Joy – and it's obvious Mr. Wellons' legacy begins with his family.

Indeed, Mr. Wellons managed to do what most businessmen, caught up in the fast-paced business world, simply can't: He made time for everything. Regardless of the long hours he devoted to his professional and philanthropic endeavors, Mr. Wellons always put the Lord first then his family, Joy Moore, the Wellons' youngest daughter, points out.

In fact, if there was one thing Mr. Wellons' four daughters – Gaye, Joy, Kathy, and Beth – could always count on it was the fact that their dad would be home for breakfast and dinner, without fail.

"Dad might go out to meetings at night when we were growing up, but he was home for dinner to spend time with us. He had breakfast with us because we had a sit down breakfast. He didn't go on long business trips, so we didn't see him. He knew all our friends. He knew our friends' parents," Gaye Mashburn said.

The Wellons daughters grew up watching their father do what he felt was right – regardless of what others thought. When the City Council annexed Mitchell Village, a move that Mr. Wellons strongly believed was best for the city, many in the community were outraged, some refusing to speak to him for several years.

Mr. Wellons, who comes from modest beginnings, also showed his children that giving back to the community was important. But, he didn't believe in grandstanding and kept most of his philanthropic activities, such as giving a family in his church their first vacation, to himself. Even his daughters didn't know the family was financially well off until they were older.

"He gave tremendously to people who did not have the means, and no one ever knew that he gave it," Mashburn said. "He stood up for something, even if everyone thought he was wrong, he would withstand what was being said if he believed it was best for the business, church, or his home life. If he felt that was the right thing, he did it. He might have made thousands of people mad, but if he felt it was right he did it."

Joy Moore agrees. "He didn't like someone to brag and he was very strong in that way. He would take up for the underdog or he would take up for the other one, whatever was right or what he felt was right," she said.

By the time Joy was a teenager, her sisters had already moved out, giving her the opportunity to spend most of her free time with her parents and to work with her father in his office. Today, the mother of three works part-time with Wellons Enterprises, while her sister, Gaye, took over her father's position in the family business.

Wellons Enterprises is truly a family business in every sense of the word. Gaye and Joy, and both of their husbands, have key roles in the business. In fact, when it comes to the decision making, Mashburn noted, the family tries to come to joint decisions.

The family runs Wellons Enterprises in a way that allows everyone to voice their opinions. There's not the "yes men" type of atmosphere that prevails in some businesses. At the meetings that are held twice each month, "Everyone brings out their points of view. We're all very open in expressing our views," Mashburn said.

Moore's role, one that even her father predicted she would one day take, is that of peacemaker. She's also the person that makes sure those in Wellons Enterprises sees both sides of the coin before they make a collective decision.

As is already evident, Mr. Wellons' work ethic and values have been passed on to his family. "He obviously instilled a lot of his value system into his family, and his daughters have taken over and are doing very well with Wellons Enterprises. They've carried on in his footsteps very well, Martin said.

The hole Mr. Wellons' absence has created is felt by both his former colleagues and his family. "He meant a lot to me personally and I appreciate what he did for the community," Martin said.

"He was just an outstanding person," Beam said.

But, it is the Wellons family – his wife, daughters, sons-in-law, and thirteen grandchildren, in particular – who will miss Mr. Wellons' the most. "I think we naturally miss him. There's a lot of people that miss him. I think people were around him because daddy had an ability to hang around all types of people and make everybody feel comfortable, and that's a gift. He just wanted to give the best to all people," Moore said.