

# NEW FAMILY BUSINESS OF THE YEAR



## J.L.E. ENTERPRISES, INC.

Aumsville, OR

In most family businesses, children follow their parents into the company. J.L.E. Enterprises is a company started by a 16-year old son who enlisted his mother and recruited his father—plus sisters, uncle, and an assortment of other family members—to join the business. Gary Enger was determined at a very young age to spend his time with wheels whether it was matchbox cars or a truck and semi-trailer. That self-reliant and driven teenager has expanded a mobile-unit power washer and grown it into a multi-state enterprise of environmentally conscious truck detailing and washing facilities.

“Better, faster, cheaper” has been Gary’s motto from the moment he visited the truck washing facility at his father’s office. “I can do that,” said the 14-year old, “when can I start?” Gary’s dad, Jim Enger, told him that the job belonged to someone else. Never losing sight of his dream, Gary got his driver’s license and a power washer on his sixteenth birthday.



*Gary Enger, 16*



When the truck washer retired, Gary got his job. For the next few years he washed trucks twice a week and supplemented his income by working summers on the graveyard shift at a cannery. Two summers at the cannery convinced Gary that he would never work for anyone but himself. During the day, he knocked on doors selling his truck-washing services. Eventually, he convinced trucking companies to give him a chance, and by his junior year in college, Gary had five employees.

It was difficult to focus on business classes while running work crews and making sales from his purse-sized cell phone and pager. By his junior year, he made a choice. “Most people are in school to get job skills,” he says. “I had a business and a career that I couldn’t run because I was

going to school.” With difficulty, Gary and his parents decided that he should pursue his business, knowing that college would be there if he needed to return.

The company grew rapidly, and Gary’s mom, Lila Enger, devoted 100 percent to paperwork such as the bills, invoices and bids. “Those were the good times,” he says. “How many 20-year-olds talk to their mom eight to ten times a day?” Although Gary bought his mom a typewriter, no paycheck came her way. “Mom probably didn’t get paid for about ten years. I owe her a lot for that.”

When the paperwork couldn’t keep up with business growth, J.L.E. hired a consultant to computerize the books. About 10 years ago, they hired consultant Sharon Jones full-time as their accounting manager and controller. Lila continues



## J.L.E. ENTERPRISES, INC. IS HONORED FOR

- ❖ The teenage visionary who said, "I could do that," and whose father replied, "I guess you could."
- ❖ The young man who washed trailers every week during high school and on into college then was so strong-willed that he also worked graveyard at the cannery and did daily doubles for football one summer, "One tired boy!"
- ❖ The son who brought in his father and other family members and who saw them complement one another very well.
- ❖ Giving employees an opportunity to improve themselves and rise in responsibility with the company.
- ❖ Implementing progressive practices that have lowered costs, improved cleaning, reduced the time required, and kept the environment green.
- ❖ Having a common goal and being too stubborn to give up on it or each other at the same time.

as the corporate secretary and handles special projects. Gary's sister, Becky, who fondly remembers scrubbing smoke stacks in the early years, balances the bank statements and posts the account receivables by connecting directly to J.L.E.'s corporate computers from her home in Redmond, OR.

In 1994, Gary finally convinced his father to facilitate the company's rapid growth by setting up federally compliant waste stream management systems. "To leave my full-time position and give up that income in my chosen career was very difficult," says Jim. "It has been a great experience, and I'm as excited now as I was apprehensive then." Today, he is the company president, and his brother, Vince, is the treasurer and detail shop manager.

As vice president and general manager, 34-year old Gary still focuses on growing the

business through sales and customer relations. He started his business to support himself and continued it as a way to support his family. Now he has broadened that scope to concern for his 50-plus family of employees. Everyone is expected to have good work ethic. In return, they earn a family wage and receive as much flexibility as possible to take care of their own family obligations.

With key company staff working 50 to 60 hours a week, it is hard not to continue conversations at family gatherings. Even Gary does his

best to spend at least one full day with his family. He regularly attends his daughters' dance performances and helps coach his son's baseball team. "The first years were really tough when the kids were little," says Gary's wife, Lorena. The couple had several years together before starting their family, which helped solidify both the marriage and the business. When his third child was on the way, though, Gary knew he had to find a way to carve out more time for his most important priority. "Life isn't all about a family business," he says. "Life is about family."●



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