



ENVIRO
AgScience, Inc.

PASSING the TORCH

Louis Lynn grooms next generation to take over his 29-year-old family firm

By Carolyn M. Brown

LOUIS B. LYNN'S FAMILY TREE IS ROOTED IN ENTREPRENEURSHIP. HIS GRANDFATHER owned a grocery store and his father ran a butcher shop. "My father was businessman of the year back in the '60s. Last year we won the Ronald H. Brown Leadership Award," says the president and chief horticulturalist of ENVIRO AgScience Inc. (No. 84 on the **BE INDUSTRIAL/SERVICE COMPANIES** list with \$28 million in revenues). The 29-year-old family-owned business provides construction, construction management, architectural, and landscape services. In addition to its Columbia, South Carolina, headquarters, ENVIRO has offices in Atlanta, Las Vegas, and Los Angeles.

Lynn launched ENVIRO in 1984 using his severance pay for 15 years of service after being downsized from a middle management position at Monsanto, one of the nation's largest agricultural companies. As someone who follows the "each one, teach one" principle, Lynn could have become a college professor; he holds bachelor's and master's degrees in horticulture from Clemson University and a Ph.D. from the University of Maryland. But it was the entrepreneurial bug and a green thumb that led him to create a commercial lawn care business that he has cultivated into a full-service construction management company servicing private sector, government, education, and military clients.

Now it is the next generation, Lynn's children, who are spearheading plans to make ENVIRO a multinational company. His daughters Adrienne Lynn, 39, an engineer, and Krystal Conner, 36, a pharmacist, serve as vice presidents. His son, Bryan, 28, is a landscape manager.

Furthermore, a succession plan is in place for Lynn to pass the reins on to his daughters and thereby transition ENVIRO into a certified minority- and woman-owned enterprise. Lynn will stay on as chairman, while Krystal will serve as CEO and Adrienne as president. "My father didn't pass on a business but the desire to start a business," the 64-year-old Lynn says. "We are the first generation in my family to have a real opportunity to pass on a substantial business."

BUILDING A LONGSTANDING BUSINESS

Today, ENVIRO's primary focus is K-12 public schools and Department of Defense facilities. But Lynn and his crew have enhanced the curb appeal at institutions such as the University of South Carolina, Benedict College, and the Columbia Convention Center. His handiwork can also be seen in the revitalization of local housing properties. ENVIRO is the prime contractor on a \$14-million personnel dining facility at Camp Lejeune in Jacksonville, North Carolina.

"We have developed a unique niche for design-build and integrated project delivery," says Lynn. A HUBZone Small Business and a 2012 graduate of the Small Business Administration's 8(a) development program, ENVIRO was able to land lucrative federal contracts as a certified minority enterprise and to expand into commercial construction through mentor-protégé agreements.

Lynn's daughters have set their sights on global alliances and bringing ENVIRO's construction management expertise to

markets in Canada and Australia. "The governments in both of these countries have business development programs [catering to indigenous people] similar to the SBA and MBDA programs that ENVIRO has benefited from. We are looking to joint venture with companies that are native to those areas," says Krystal.

SPROUTING A SUCCESSION PLAN

For nearly the past two years, the Lynns have been working with the family division of the Minority Business Development Agency Business Center operated by Georgia Tech's Enterprise Innovative Institute. They drafted a succession plan, a 40-page living document that lays out Lynn's overall objectives for his company, a legal structure, and a transition timeline.

"Our succession plan has a lot of the features of the model used by H.J. Russell of Atlanta-based H.J. Russell & Co. (No. 15 on the **BE INDUSTRIAL/SERVICE COMPANIES** list with \$248 million in revenues), but recognizes the unique challenges for women in the male-dominated construction industry," says Lynn, referring specifically to the founder continuing to provide tutelage and making sure each daughter knows her assigned role. Adrienne handles most of ENVIRO's marketing and business development, and Krystal oversees what Lynn refers to as money and people.

"My father has always referred to the business as a big mom-and-pop shop. We are growing out of that mentality of doing whatever it takes to keep the business running by ourselves and have engaged professional service firms to help," says Krystal, who joined the family business seven years ago and holds an M.B.A. from Mercer University's Stetson School of Business and Economics in Atlanta. "There were a lot of gaps that we needed to fill in terms of policies and procedures that weren't in place." For example, they hired a human resources consultant to develop a process for hiring and terminating employees. "There is a lot more that takes place behind the scenes than just handing over the company," says Adrienne, who spent 15 years in middle management at Sonoco Products Co. and Campbell Soup Co. Laying the groundwork to keep the company and grow it exponentially involves working with the MBDA's global business center in San Antonio.

Having traveled to Brazil earlier this year, the sisters are currently in talks with a well-established company there about a possible joint venture. "We hired a firm to translate our marketing information to Portuguese and have been taking lessons for the past six months to learn the language," notes Krystal, which speaks volumes of the duo's commitment. **BE**