

# Chase Upholstery: A dream 30 years old and still growing

By Bob Rufe

"You hear so many stories of people who had a dream and the desire to have their own business. We are the same kind of people. Thirty years ago we started our business in our basement and today we're doing well and still growing," said Bob Chase, owner of Chase's Upholstery, as he reminisced about the success he has built with the help of his wife, Vivian, and his children.

Reflecting on his background, Chase said: "I started working for the Kroehler Furniture Company in Naperville in 1946. That was a summer job,

but it was a good job so I went full time with them in November 1947. After six years I felt that I needed to broaden my knowledge and experience, so I changed jobs and moved to the Pullman Couch Company.

"By this time in my life, I had discovered what a lot of other people have learned. That is, you can make a mistake if you stay too long at one company, especially in a craft type business. I wanted to keep learning and improving my skills. That's why I changed jobs several times. After another six years I changed again and went to the Simmons Company."

Continuing, he said: "It was during the time that I was at Pullman that I started thinking about having my own business. I had met Vivian several years earlier and as we made plans for marriage, we also made plans for our business. She went to work at Kroehler in order to learn how to sew upholstery so that we could work as a team when our dream became a reality. We were married in 1956.

"When I got the job at Simmons I was a superintendent in the plant and had a lot of responsibility. It was a great job, but the desire continued to grow in me to build my own

furniture. One day in 1962 I told my boss that I was going to quit because I wanted to start my own upholstery business. He was a good friend and source of great encouragement to me. He told me that I couldn't quit, but that he would fire me, because that way he could pay me severance. That bit of financial help is what got us started.

"But my friend's encouragement did not stop there. About four months after we opened our shop he subcontracted with us to build one hundred floor models of furniture for John M. Smythe. That job helped us get over the difficult start-up stage, and we never looked back."

Chase said he believes his business is now the largest reupholstery shop in the Chicago area. It turns out 50 to 70 pieces of furniture a week and employs 15-20 people, mostly full time, with some part-time help. "Because every piece of furniture is different, it takes about ten years for a person to learn all aspects of this business. We're extremely proud of our people and their craftsmanship," he added.

Reflecting on their years of partnership in business and marriage, Chase said, "Vivian was a very important part of this business. We worked side by side for years. She did everything in the business, and along the way she raised eight children. She's a remarkable woman and I couldn't have done this without her."

Chase is gradually passing ownership of the business to two daughters, Cindy and Robin, and one son, Bob, who elected to participate in the business. Cindy's husband, Steve, is actually managing the business now, as the day-to-day



(Photos by Pat VanDoren)

Steve Paver and Robert Chase Jr. (right) working on chair. "Trust" is their staple.

Robin Chase-Carey, is second generation in the Warrenville upholstery business.

➤ Turn to CHASE on Page 28

# Chase

*Continued from Page 26*

management responsibilities have been turned over to him.

When asked what factors were the keys to success Chase said, "Doing quality work and delivering what we promise.

There was a period of time when we got caught up in trying to become a high volume business. But we quickly realized that we were losing control of quality. Companies that get too big sometimes lose the vision that created them. So we scaled back to a size where we can ensure that every job is done right.

If one of our people sees that a job is not going together well, they have the authority to tear it down and start over. We deliver what we promise and we have never been stuck with a job that a customer would not accept.

"This is a trust business," he continued. "In the beginning I had to sell people on the fact that we could do the job. They wanted to trust me before they would entrust their furniture to me. We don't require deposits because we don't want customers to pay until they are satisfied. And, we don't accept credit cards because we do not believe that people should go into debt over a piece of furniture. We are successful because



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over these 30 years we have established a reputation that people trust. They trust the craftsmanship of our people. They know that we deliver quality work, on time, and to their satisfaction."

Chase's Upholstery is

located on Warrenville Road, two blocks west of Mill Street. Business hours are 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday, and 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Saturday for sales consultations only. The telephone number is 393-1640.