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Mayo, Davis, Jim, and Colton at their Perry distribution center.



OIL IN THE FAMILY



What started as a small business serving the agriculture community of 1946, the family-owned Davis Oil Company located in Perry has grown to be the leading oil distributor in Houston County. The third generation of the Davis family is at the helm today continuing the company's philosophy of treating customers and employees like family, giving back to the community, and growing through innovation.

THE EARLY YEARS

Founded sixty years ago by the grandfather, Mayo Davis, the company became a distributor of Shell Oil Company in 1949. Son-in-law Bill Sexton joined the company in 1955, and was instrumental in establishing the network of fuel stations across the mid-state that is the basis for the success of Davis Oil today. The third generation of the Davis family leads the company now and includes the three Sexton brothers, Colton, President of Davis Oil; Jim, Vice President; and Mayo, Director of Fleet Fuels; and their half-brother, Davis Cosey, CEO.

According to the brothers, their father built the first string of Davis Oil service stations in Perry and Warner Robins in the late 1950s and early 1960s, but the business really began to boom with the arrival of Interstate 75. "Before the interstate, this was just a slow community with not that many cars and traffic," comments Colton. "Highway 41 was the major thoroughfare. Everything changed for the town and the people when the interstate came through. We were affected like everybody else."

Bill Sexton recognized the potential of the interstate early on and began purchasing land at the interstate exits for the purpose of building service stations say the brothers. "Daddy built the first ranch-type style service station for Davis Oil on the interstate," shares Jim. According to Davis, this particular station was innovative at the time because the Shell sign was

a single pole, high-rise sign—something that was still relatively new along the interstate's horizon. "Those signs weren't something that was done everywhere," adds Davis. "Executives from Shell came down from Atlanta just to see it."

Following the initial construction of service stations along the interstate, Sexton built four more stations; however, these were unique because they had restaurants inside them. Davis explains that while the stations still had the service

bay on the side, already the service side of the business was being phased out. "Even though the stations were located on the interstate, the service part was being downplayed in favor of food and serving the transient customer, he says."

The brothers remember how passionate their father was about the development of the service stations and of growing the family business. "Daddy had a cottage at Myrtle Beach in the early 1960s," tells Mayo. "He sold that cottage to buy a



Staff members Kathy Carrier, Jan Underwood, Christi Ivie, Caroline Cunningham and Jana Sikes are an integral part of the successful day-to-day operations.



Davis Oil trucks can be seen distributing product throughout the region.

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service station, the one here in Perry in front of WalMart. He just believed in the business that much that he would give up something he really loved and put his own money into it. That station became one of our best units."

Colton agrees. "He was that kind of person. He made a lot of sacrifices in a lot of different ways to make the business better for us." Sadly, Bill Sexton passed away in November of 2005, but his sons say he remained very involved in the family

business he helped grow until his passing. "He would attend meetings and share his wisdom," says Mayo. "He was not overbearing with his opinion. He gave it, but not in a way that was critical. He was constantly cheering you on. We miss that."

NEW LEADERSHIP

The current generation of the Davis family has made significant contributions in their own right to growing the family business. Davis was the first of the

brothers to join the company arriving in 1979 during the final years of the oil embargo. "The only way you could increase your gasoline allocations at that time was to find or develop new stations," explains Davis. "So that's what we did." According to Mayo, those two years from 1979 to 1981 began the phenomenal growth trend that Davis Oil has experienced over the last twenty-six years.

With their grandfather ailing and their father taking ill with rheumatoid arthritis, the family business needed new leadership. "Davis was the key to the business from 1980 on," comments Colton. "When he came on board he had to take charge, and he launched it into what it is today. Davis had the vision of moving from service stations to convenience stores."

The brothers describe their first convenience store operation in 1980 as a definite learning experience. Located in Sycamore, Georgia, it was the first store that they actually operated as a Davis Oil Company store doing all of the work of running the store themselves. "Self-serve permits were sort of a new idea at the time so we actually went down and pumped gas ourselves," tells Davis. "I got up every morning for two weeks and drove all the way to Sycamore, which is an hour away, opened the store at 7 a.m. and closed at 11 p.m., and then drove home. Man, I was young back then! Working for 18 hour days including driving didn't leave much time for sleep."

Always thinking ahead and working to improve the customer experience at their convenience stores, Davis recounts that while on a business trip to Las Vegas, Nevada, he and Jim studied an architectural mock up of Shell's new station canopy at the time, the Shell Silverado. "We were rebuilding the station beside the Waffle House on Sam Nunn Boulevard in Perry," he describes. "We had torn the old building down and were putting up the canopy and Shell changed the design to the Shell Silverado.



Davis, Jim, and Ed Chapman, CFO (sitting) review plans for Davis Oil's new Chevron station to be built at highway intersection 127 and Houston Lake Road.

When Jim and I got back from Las Vegas we changed the design of ours to the new style, making it the first of its kind east of the Rockies.”

In addition to being Shell distributors, Davis Oil is also a distributor for Chevron, and has been for 15 years. “We are proud to be distributors of both brands,” says Colton.

THE FUTURE

Staying ahead of the game is what has kept Davis Oil Company on the forefront of the oil industry, and the alternative fuel business is no exception. To them, it’s not new because they started selling biodiesel and ethanol to Robins Air Force Base more than two years ago. “Because of the Base and the people who live here, Houston County is a more progressive thinking area as far as the benefits of alternative fuels,” says Davis. “Our getting into the alternative fuel business is just another part of being in Houston County.”

Davis agrees the idea of alternative fuels is new to the average customer and he says Davis Oil is working to make these fuels available to their customers in Houston County. “We’ve recently put in a retail biodiesel pump on Gunn Road and Highway 41,” he says. “All of our future plans for new stations will include the biodiesel pump and a lot of the stations we are retrofitting now will include them as well.”

They all believe there is a bright future in alternative fuels and are very committed to providing such innovation to Houston County. As a result of their efforts, Davis Oil has become the largest seller of

biodiesel in Georgia whose product is used right here in the state. Davis says biodiesel is produced in two different facilities in Georgia but the majority of there product is shipped out of state. “We actually sell biodiesel, both wholesale and retail, within the state,” he explains. “The willingness of organizations such as our

local school boards to use biodiesel in their bus fleets drives us to make more investments in our infrastructure to be able to provide the product.”

However, ethanol, or E85, is proving to be a bigger challenge. Davis explains that while they are ready to make E85 available to their customers they are

Bill Bernard, Wholesale Operations Manager, and Mayo in the company’s wholesale inventory warehouse.



simply unable to because the pumping equipment is not yet being manufactured. He says it's all about the customer's experience when using the pump. "We could easily put a dispenser on the side of the property similar to kerosene pumps," Davis says. "But what we did with the biodiesel and what we plan to do with the E85 is to have the nice dispenser where the customer can insert the card like the other pumps. That's the reason we're waiting."

THE PEOPLE

That has always been the Davis Oil Company philosophy—to take care of the people that keep them in business—their customers and their employees. "We realize our customers are the reason we are

here," comments Mayo. "Our philosophy has always been to take care of our customers first."

But they are quick to point out that Davis Oil would not be the company it is without the people who do the work each and everyday. "The key is really just hiring good people and letting them do their job," Mayo says matter-of-factly. "Everything else...it just takes care of itself."

Both Colton and Jim agree. "We are blessed with the people we have working for us," says Colton. "You get the right people that you can trust it takes a lot of pressure and a lot of stress off of you," explains Jim.

For Colton, the thing he is most proud of is the fact that all of four of them were very hands on when they were younger

and just starting in the business. From sign and construction work to running convenience stores they did it all, he says. "We would never ask anybody to do anything that we weren't willing to do or had not done," he states. "I think that has created a good bond between us and our people."

But all of them say they are thankful to the people of Houston County who support them and they try to show that gratitude by giving back as much to the community as possible. "We are proud to be associated and active in our community and able to give back a little bit of what we get," says Colton. "We interact strongly with the Houston County community, and we feel it's a win-win for everybody."

Tara Poole

Photography by Ken Krakow

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Colton pictured with Tommy Wehrle, Retail District Manager, inside one of their Perry convenience stores.

