

Western Massachusetts Entrepreneurship Hall of Fame Class of 2008



Matthew Samble, Robert Samble Jr., and Derek Samble

The Samble Family

Belmont Laundry

For close to a century now, there have been trucks bearing the name Belmont Laundry picking up and delivering clothes, uniforms, and even 'welcome' mats at businesses and homes across the region. The first of these trucks was driven by Harry Samble, who started in business with his wife Corrine in

1907, working out of a barn on Belmont Street in Springfield, at the same location where the company's headquarters is located today. And before moving on to the truck, Harry Samble used a bicycle and, later, a horse and carriage.

He had to perform virtually each and every duty to get his fledgling enterprise off the ground, and he wasn't afraid to get his hands dirty while making laundry clean, a tradition that continues with his great-grandsons, who have lead roles in this venture that now has a fleet of trucks and more than 50 employees, and handles more than 1,000 commercial accounts. How the company arrived at this state is a story of vision and perseverance that involves several members of the Samble family, starting with Harry and Corrine, who started by providing a service called 'wet wash': they would pick up laundry, wash it, and bring it back to the customer wet, to be dried on a line outside.

Commercial driers were one of many innovations that would change the course of service for this business, the survival of which fell into the hands of Corrine and her son, Robert, after Harry Samble died at a young age. The two managed to not merely survive but thrive while also introducing the region to the concept known as dry cleaning. In 1967, Robert Samble passed away, leaving his wife, Dorothy, and, eventually, his son, Robert Jr., to carry on.

They did, and Robert Jr., who took the helm in the mid '70s, has led the company to significant expansion, including new locations in Agawam, West Springfield, Longmeadow, and a second store in Springfield, as well as diversification. Today, several fourth-generation members of the Samble family continue the tradition, including Robert Samble's sons Matthew, now project manager, and Derek, the dry-cleaning division manager, and his step-daughter April Caruso, who is supervisor of counter staff.

Together, they continue a pattern of innovation and quality service that has enabled the company and its trucks to keep rolling for 101 years. The times, clothing styles, and dress habits have certainly changed over the years — Harry Samble didn't have to contend with casual Friday — but the company has persevered through it all. And it is this perseverance that has earned the Samble family induction into the Western Massachusetts Entrepreneurship Hall of Fame.