

## **Profile Story - Kevin Sommer**

Kevin Sommer of Service Motor Company grew up an active and spunky kid, involved in track, wrestling and football. Upon graduating from Appleton West High School, he was faced with the tough decision of where he would go next.

“At one point I was done with football and it was like, ok I have these 10 letters to play football, dad what do you think?” he said.

Kevin’s father, Jim Sommer presented him with the opportunity to take over for the grandfather who was planning to retire, and be among the next generation to own the company.

“As I was growing up, it was always in the business,” Kevin said. “For the current generations that’s all we know is family and it's a way of life.”

Without hesitation Kevin agreed to commit his career to Service Motor Company, and carry on the family legacy.

“He needed help running the business with all the lines that we had, so at that time that's when Kimberlee and myself came into the business,” Kevin said.

Kimberlee (Kim) Sommer is Kevin’s older sister and is also part owner of Service Motor Company. She said she doesn't know where the company would be without his positive and optimistic attitude.

“He’s that big picture strategist,” she said. “We wouldn’t be where we are right now without his forward thinking, and long-term future planning. It was always intended that Kevin and I be the ones who take over.”

The passion for farming and agriculture ran through the Sommer family since 1916. Service Motor Company has been in business for 103 years, passing down the ownership from generation to generation.

They even named their five family dogs all after tractor brands: Kasey, Snapper, Kubota, Hesston and Deutz.

Since 1916, Service Motor Company has expanded to six locations across northeast Wisconsin, and went from about 25 employees to now 150 employees.

Jim said Kevin is one of the main influences of the growth and success of the company.

“He’s the optimistic one that tries to encourage the salesmen to go out and do more, sell more and is always positive,” he said. Someone in charge of whole good sales has to have a positive attitude.”

Kim also recognizes Kevin as being a valuable asset and is able to balance her out to make a great team.

“He is more of the hope and positive aspect of the business,” Kim said. He’s not ‘what’s in it for us’ he wants to know what he can do for the customer.”

Following in his father’s footsteps, Kevin had been working for the family business since he was 14 years old. He would wax tractors, cut lawns, weed wack, and sweep shop floors, until moving his way up to the stock department.

Kevin proved his loyalty to family after graduating with a business degree from Fox Valley Technical College. He decided without hesitation that it was his responsibility to carry on the family legacy, and committed his career to Service Motor Company.

“It was letting them make their own decisions about what they wanted to do,” Jim said. “Once they were committed to wanting to work here then the next step was to become an owner.”

Kim credits Kevin for the vast success of the company and keeping her level headed when it comes to making decisions.

“Kevin and I have a good dynamic, he’s very cool calm and collected and I’m a little bit more high strung,” she said. “A good yin and yang, he’s got qualities that I don’t have and vice versa, so we really compliment each other well.”

She said she admires his big picture mentality and get-it-done attitude.

“He’s definitely a visionary and sometimes visionaries like to throw out ideas and see what sticks,” she said.

Kevin said it’s sometimes tough to all be on the same page when it comes to business decisions, but at the end of the day he’s always the most grateful for family.

“Even though you have disagreements with your family, we can agree on different ways to handle things,” he said. At the end of the day you still love and respect each other.”

Kim said she couldn’t imagine being in business with anyone beside her younger brother.

“There’s an ‘I have your back’ with Kevin, knowing that even though we might have some disagreements here or there we are always trying to be supportive of each other,” she said.

Jim has a more hands off approach when it comes to running the business, and said he tries to leave most decisions up to Kevin and Kim; unless they need his input. In that case they do a two-thirds vote.

“You’re educating them every time you do something, and you’re learning along with them,” he said.

The next generation in line to take over Service Motor Company would be Kevin’s three children ages 8, 11, and 14. Kevin said that just like his father, he wants to make it their choice whether or not they want to be part of the business.

“From a comedic level I’ve told all my kids, ‘you’re my retirement plan’,” he said. “I would like to see it in the family and continue on, it would be in a better place if they want to be here rather than it being forced on them.”

Kim is confident his children will take over and continue to grow the business across northeast Wisconsin.

“Make sure you love it,” she said. “There’s a weight on your shoulders, you take care of not only your family but other families.”

Kevin said he ensures the Sommer family does their best each day to surpass the needs of both their customers and employees.

“We want to improve and look for a stronger tomorrow,” he said. “We’re a close knit family and I think that’s really helped us. It’s comfortable being happy who you work with.”