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Auburn man's bright idea spawned family business

Century Lighting celebrates 30 years of personal touch, forward focus

By: Gus Thomson, Journal Staff Writer



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An Auburn business that started with its owner delivering light bulbs out of a station wagon now employs more than 100 people and is marking its 30th anniversary.

Century Lighting & Electric continues to grow as it moves into its fourth decade, with energy-efficient LED lighting and other technological advances driving the industry and the business forward.

Keith Estes, Century Lighting's president and founder, said the business has succeeded over the past 30 years by focusing on the future but also fostering strong workplace bonds.

And while the business has grown, it has

retained a personal touch.

"We're very much a family business," Estes said. "It's the best place to work.' We hear that a lot."

As well as Estes, Century Lighting also employs Keith's wife of 39 years, Traci. Son Brent, a 2001 Placer High grad who pitched on the baseball team, has found a key post as vice president of sales and marketing. Youngest daughter Lorin provides graphic design and other duties. Eldest daughter Sherra serves in a youth ministry in Hawaii.

The business started in a small metal building on Canal Street in North Auburn and then expanded in 1987 to a new building at the Auburn Airport Industrial Park. Estes had started selling lighting supplies while still a business student in San Francisco and had nine years of sales experience before going into the lighting business on his own in Auburn. More buildings have been added since then, and Century Lighting is poised next month to start construction on a 6,000-square-foot warehouse on undeveloped land adjacent to its Earhart Avenue headquarters.

Estes said Brent has been a major driving force in moving sales and service beyond the Sacramento region, farther into the Bay Area and as far south as Bakersfield. Century Lighting can count more than 2,000 customers on contract to keep lights burning and systems working properly. Century has 30 service vehicles operating from 14 satellite locations.

Century Lighting also has found a market regionally for switching to more energy-efficient LED lighting. One recent contract resulted in Century installing 3,000 new fixtures at the Rocklin and Nevada County campuses of Sierra College.

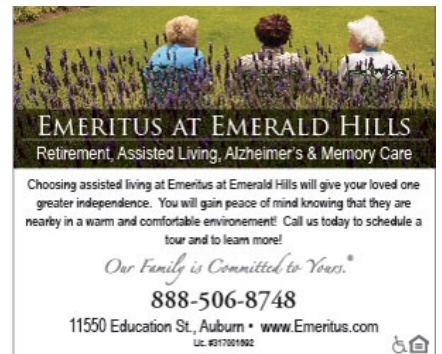
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Brent Estes said success has come over the years with the right workplace environment.

"The key is a team environment and a high level of customer service," Estes said. "We've gained a positive reputation, and a strong group of dedicated people helps us succeed."

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