

Catholic prayed a lot before leaping into business at 50

Lawrence “Larry” Wilson never dreamed of owning his own business, but a good deed resulted in him doing just that.

With a degree in accounting and a background in business, Mr. Wilson had been happily ensconced at a Fortune 500 company until he was 50.

Then his personal accountant told him about a local business that was struggling because the owner’s son had died in a car accident. The company manufactured signs used by the real estate industry.

“He sure could use your help right about now,” he remembers his accountant saying to him. “I helped him – and within a month or so, I offered to buy the business.”

It was a scary leap for the longtime parishioner of St. Ignatius, Hickory.

“I did a lot of praying,” he said. “When you go and sign your name on the bank papers and mortgage your house and mortgage your refrigerator, you say, ‘Am I doing the right thing?’ You do a lot of praying.”

But he saw an opportunity to work with his son, Marty, who came on board to handle sales and marketing, and then his daughter, Kelly, joined the business, as did his wife, Carolyn. He forged a relationship with his bank, acquired a small business administration loan, and together they built Landmark Signs into a company that employs 35 people.

“It’s been very rewarding to have your family work with you,” he said. “We had all the right ingredients.”

But he admits that it proved more challenging than he realized to handle all of the responsibilities of a business, including employee relations, relationships with customers, and manufacturing.

Now 67, he recently retired from day-to-day activities although he still owns the

business. Reflecting on owning his own business he said, "It wasn't a lifelong dream or desire - it just happened to be circumstances. Now I look back on it and say, 'Why didn't I do this when I was 30 instead of 50?' I needed a lot of help spiritually - it was scary at my age. But I enjoyed going to work every day; I've always been a people person, particularly with my family, but I've always been an administrator."

He's used his business skills over the years at his parish, too, where he's served on the finance and building committees, as well as having served as an extraordinary minister of holy Communion.

He's proud that he was able to start a business and "see people in the organization have jobs and provide for their families. It gives you a good feeling to provide not just for your own family, but for a whole lot of other folks."