

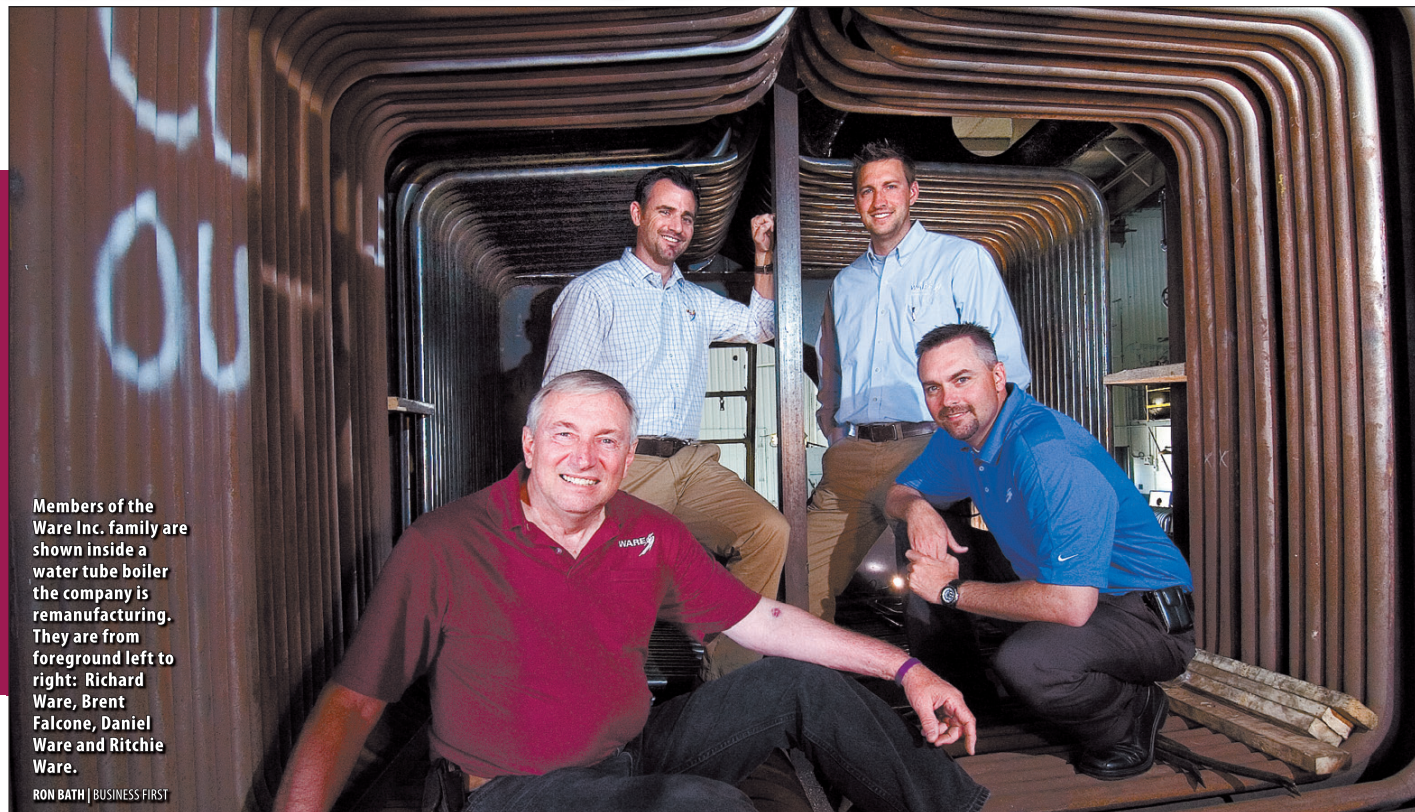
BIZTRENDS FAMILY BUSINESS

Q&A BRIEFS AT WORK

Delicate TRANSITIONS

Family-owned businesses share common challenges when it comes to transitioning ownership and leadership of a company from one generation to the next. Those firms also face circumstances that are as unique as the people who run them.

For this article, Business First talked with owners at three Louisville-area businesses that have passed the torch at least once. The stories, which appear on this page and pages 16 and 17, examine the benefits, challenges and lessons learned in making those transitions.



Members of the Ware Inc. family are shown inside a water tube boiler the company is remanufacturing. They are from foreground left to right: Richard Ware, Brent Falcone, Daniel Ware and Ritchie Ware.

RON BATH | BUSINESS FIRST

Leading Ware has been learning experience for younger generation

BY BEN ADKINS | STAFF WRITER

Ware Inc. has thrived in the past 10 years, doubling revenue during that period, according to Ritchie Ware, vice president of sales and marketing.

But a decade of success followed what was a difficult period for the business.

About 20 years ago, company owner Richard Ware suffered a head injury in a car accident. The senior Ware spent a couple of years undergoing rehabilitation, during which time he was unable to run the business.

The company went through different iterations of leadership before Richard Ware's son, Ritchie Ware, and Richard Ware's son-in-law, Brent Falcone, became vice presidents. Falcone oversees the operations side of the business.

At that point, the business was ready "to go into a different direction," Ritchie Ware said, and board chairman Carl Liebert, now deceased, felt the younger generation had the ability to lead under his guidance.

"We were young and didn't know what we were getting into," Ware said. "But we had a lot of energy and wanted to grow something."

And grow, they have.

The company bought a business in Chattanooga, Tenn., allowing it to expand service offerings to customers in Tennessee, Alabama and Georgia. It also improved its service, Ware said, which helped gain customers.

Ritchie Ware, 41, spent time working in the business when he was younger, before he went to college, got drafted and played for the Los Angeles Dodgers' farm team and subsequently coached college baseball in Nashville, Tenn.

He returned to Louisville to be closer to family and went back to work for the family company.

Like Ritchie Ware, Falcone also has worked in the various divisions of the business, and Daniel Ware, 30, is doing the same.

"It was all in preparation to ... come up through management and to be a family member that is leading the business and being able to make those decisions," Ritchie Ware said.

Although Richard Ware currently owns the business and serves as president, the company is working with law firm Frost Brown Todd LLC to explore different options con-

cerning the transfer of ownership within the family. That probably will occur in the next five years or so, Ritchie Ware said.

There have been challenges. The Chattanooga business proved difficult to manage from afar, Ware said, yet it still is in operation.

But the experiences have been educational in other ways, too.

Ware emphasized the importance of listening to co-workers and elders who helped the company be successful.

"The thing that I've learned the most in growing through this business is that we have good people, and they understand this business. They understand their job, and you better listen more than you talk.

"And when you talk, you're asking questions."

WARE INC.

Type of business: Sells, rents and services commercial boilers, cooling equipment and related items

Revenue: Declined to disclose figures

Employees: 80

A bit of advice from Ritchie Ware, vice president of sales and marketing for Ware Inc., for other family businesses: Check your ego and stay humble. "In a family business, it can't always be done your way. There's definitely give and take."