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## From Farm to Foodliner: Knott credits farm background for grocery business success

By Freddie Bourne Messenger-Inquirer

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Camron Knott, owner and operator of Camron's Foodliner locations in Livermore and Sacramento, is pictured Dec. 9 with a John Deere tractor at his Sacramento location.

Freddie Bourne | McLean County News

While Camron Knott grew up with a farm background, he doesn't personally consider himself a farmer.

"...We did a couple different things but we always did tobacco," Knott said. "But there was a time we raised peppers for a couple years; we raised tomatoes for a couple years; we raised strawberries for several years."

The Owensboro farm was owned by Knott's great-grandfather, which was then bought by Knott's father and great uncles.

The strawberry business seemed to be booming at one point, starting out as a small patch before Knott's father started selling them to friends and co-workers and eventually gained some public notice that people were wanting to come out and pick their own.

This experience helped Knott develop his work ethic at a young age and people to look up to.

"Growing up, I had ... role models, I would consider, of my great uncles, that lived up there," Knott said. "And even the ones that didn't live up there, like their brothers, would come out to the farm if we broke down if we were cutting hay or something; they'd come out on like their lunch break (and help). I'd

always admired them because they ... could do anything. ...You never saw them cry, you never saw them get mad.

"I grew up around these men that it was like there was no problem that they couldn't solve. ...They just taught me to think through it."

And his farming experience taught Knott about defining what the word "work" means to him.

"So many look at work as ..., 'I hate it. It's a bad thing. It's a bad word,'" Knott said. "I was just always taught that it's a necessity — you have to do it and it's what you make of it."

Knott has used their guidance and leadership to parlay into opening up his own grocery store Camron's Foodliner in Sacramento in 2004, before opening up a second location in Livermore in 2019.

"... I realized the work ethic and stuff that I developed out there," Knott said. "The things I learned — I wouldn't have (the store) if it wasn't for that.

"It retrained my mindset that work is not really more of a priority, but that it's like, 'This is got to get done.' ...And if you have a good attitude, you're going to get it done sooner than if you have a bad attitude and you're dragging your feet ...."

The discipline that he learned from his role models also helped Knott keep him focused on the task at hand of running the stores and the daily problems that he may encounter.

"...There are several keys to running any business, ... especially a business like this that's open seven days a week," Knott said. "Pretty much anybody that's running a grocery store, anybody that's running a restaurant or different businesses that are in my boat, pretty much you have to work seven days a week; even if you're sick, you're still having to work."

The grocery business was also part of Knott's upbringing, as Knott's father's day gig was working as a manager for a store in Owensboro before moving onto another career with Kentucky Lottery, where he was going in and out of stores throughout the state.

Knott followed in similar footsteps of his father and got his first job at 16 working at a Foodland in Owensboro, while also getting his feet wet in other industries such as construction work.

While studying business management at Western Kentucky University, Knott initially had intentions of owning his own restaurant and bar but found himself changing his path after graduation.

"...(The Sacramento store) came for sale and my dad was the one that actually found it," Knott said.

At first, Knott and his father were going to purchase the building together until Knott decided to buy it himself.

"I bought it and here we are," Knott said. "Living the dream."

However, when Knott bought the first store, his father decided to stop raising tobacco all together. Though Knott took a year to focus on getting the store up and running, he found it odd to not do something he did regularly.

“That year, ...it was just crazy. I never thought that I would miss the tobacco,” Knott said. “As a kid, I always was just like, ‘I just can’t wait when we don’t raise this.’ And, I would be driving down the road and someone would be spraying the chemical, they’d be cutting the tobacco — you drive by a tobacco barn with tobacco in it and it was like all these smells .... I just hit a point to where I was talking to a customer out here one day and they were talking about signing up with tobacco and I was like, ‘You know what?’ ”

**HOBBY FARMER**Knott eventually decided to become a hobby farmer and started raising tobacco on his father’s farm in 2006, raising about four acres at first before downsizing to about two in recent years.

In 2011, Knott bought his own 40-acre farm in Calhoun where he raised beans and corn, even selling some of the sweet corn he raised seasonally at both Camron’s Foodliner locations.

“Once you got the dirt under your fingernails, you can’t get it out,” Knott said. “I consider myself a hobby farmer because I’m not raising thousands of acres like some of these guys are doing. I’m just a guy that’s got 40 acres of beans and corn, and I’m just having fun with it.

“...Everybody’s got their own hobbies that they do. Some people like to go fishing when they get off of work, some that like to play video games — everybody’s got their own thing that they want to do. I farm ....”

While Knott doesn’t depend on the farm for his livelihood to get by, he finds some form of therapy getting out in the fresh air.

“It forces me to get out of the store, go outside, get some sunshine, sit in a tractor, get sweaty, get dirty — things that aren’t always associated with this job,” Knott said. “There’s so many times that it’s just so nice to sit in a tractor and sitting there listening to the radio and you’re working and you’re by yourself. A lot of times, my mind can go to places and if I had a problem ..., it’s that alone time where I can just be in a tractor ... or just walking the field and then it’s like, ‘You know, there’s that solution I was looking for.’ ”

While Knott admits that he took a pause on the farm for this year, he does relish the experiences that came with it.

“...It’s the kind of thing me and my dad did,” Knott said. “Even though it was my tobacco when I was there working, he would come down (and) help me. We work a little bit, sit underneath a shaded tree and (have) a father-son talk. Stripping tobacco is a really intensive part of it ... and you’re sitting in a barn and you’re at this big table stripping it, taking the leaves off of it and your dad’s on one side of it and ... it’s kind of father-son time.”

Knott has three children of his own, who have helped him in some capacity of the farm, but have been learning more about the skills in his stores such as counting money and running the cash registers. While valuable tools to learn, the experience on the farm doesn’t compare.

“There’s things I can teach them (at the store) but it’s not the same as being out in a field when it’s 105 degrees and it’s just terrible (and) nasty and most people want to call it a day, pack up and go home,” Knott said. “My great uncles just kind of taught me to make the best of it. Work at your pace, drink plenty of water and just have fun with it.”

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