

Family-owned business hits 70 years, debuts new look

By Meagan Nichols – Lead Reporter, Memphis Business Journal, Aug 1, 2016, 11:36am

The way you represent your company is your uniform and your people should feel good about what they are wearing.”

Those were the words of Robert Caen, marketing manager for Memphis-based, family-owned Uniform Masters. Caen’s grandfather Morris Caen moved to Memphis from New Jersey in 1946 to get what was then called, Mechanics Laundry up and running.

In the 1968, following the passing of Morris Caen the previous year, Robert Caen’s father, Richard Caen, decided to use his background in law and industrial engineering to reimagine the industry.

He drew on his legal expertise to implement contracted business, thus providing the company protection, and he took from his engineering knowledge and developed a complex rail system to move clothes. That same system is still in use at its Democrat Road facility.

In the 1990s Mechanics Laundry became Uniform Masters and seven decades later the company, still owned by the Caen family, just underwent a complete rebrand conducted by Tactical Magic to help pay homage to its past while making the brand more current.

“We wanted something that stood out, was fun, it identified with our history, so sort of a retro chic,” Robert said. “We wanted something that kind of brought not so much a sense of humor, but a lighter attitude to the market. It doesn’t have to be a boring commodity.”

Today, the company has 515 accounts within a 75-mile radius of Memphis.

Uniform Masters offers everything from customized uniforms and floor mats to laundering, repair and garment replacement and a personalized delivery schedule. The company is part of the CSC Network, which is the National Alliance of Independent Launderers.

That independent, local touch is what Robert said separates Uniform Masters from larger national uniform companies, which he described as “faceless.”

“We answer the phone and we respond to calls, which is drastically different,” Robert said. “They (large companies) don’t have any customer service...it’s a service business. If you are not doing that, what are you doing?”



Richard Caen and Robert Caen, with Uniform Masters, show off the company’s new logo by Tactical Magic

Robert, who grew up in the business folding shop towels at age eight and running delivery routes at 16 years old, described his dad, now 74 years old as a workaholic who goes to the office on Saturdays and Sundays by himself. Robert said it is his goal to gradually take some of the burden off of his father as he helps to transition the company into the future.

“I think it is invaluable to our city that we continue to have local family businesses that operate at a high level,” Robert said.