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JOHN LUTHER HEFLIN JR.

May 5, 1996 Publication: *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette (Little Rock, AR)* Page: *1D*
Word Count: *2148*

Looking for insects in all the right places, Johnny Heflin has built a business one crawl space at a time. But he doesn't bug out there, he's general chairman of the multi-faceted "Bolo Bash."

You know they're out there.

The multi-legged creepy crawlers that scurry around under your house or behind the walls of your business, nibbling away at the foundations and nesting in the dark cracks and crevices -- armies of pesky pests that hate to get caught by the light of day or surprised by the flick of a fluorescent kitchen light.

Makes you itch just to think about them.

But Johnny Heflin has built a business -- from the ground up, you might say -- staring down these bug-eyed creatures and exterminating them from musty crawl spaces and around the outsides of slab foundations.

As a student at Little Rock Central High School, Heflin spent his summers working for his dad at Terminix Inc. Clad in coveralls, Heflin scooted around on all fours inspecting homes and businesses of his father's customers. "There's not anything I haven't seen under houses," he says.

When he went to work for his father full time in 1969, he was one of about 30 company employees. Today, as president and chief executive officer, Heflin oversees a Terminix crew of 325 -- including his sons, Jay and Marc -- from his office in the corporate headquarters on Arch Street.

The company has 33 offices that serve 39 counties in Arkansas.

About 280 of those employees zip around their territories in red Terminix trucks with big, grinning, spotted-bottom bugs crouched atop their cabs and decked out in top hats and white gloves, a sight to behold in rear-view mirrors.

But bugs are a dying breed of mascot in Terminix franchises. Heflin says only he and one other franchisee in Fayetteville, N.C., keep them around. But Heflin believes he knows his market. And his bugs aren't going anywhere.

"People like our bugs," he says, adding that his staff often gets requests from people planning parades to use Terminix trucks. "We get calls all the time from people who say, 'Are you the people with bugs on the trucks?'"

Heflin comes across as a man who appreciates a good tradition. He's close to his family; he and his wife, Sharon, reared their sons in a house built beside his parents' home and across a gravel path from the Terminix headquarters -- the same headquarters he dad built in 1962, which is getting a face lift due to be completed in the next few weeks.

A brick facade and 8,000 square feet have been added to the cinder-block building, which will include more office space and a new conference and training room.

Heflin, who has the easy-going demeanor of a guy who wouldn't hurt a flea, doesn't spend all his time bashing bugs. He's in his seventh year on the Baptist Health board and serves on its executive committee.

And this week he's wrapping up plans for the Baptist Health Foundation's "Bolo Bash '96," which kicks off at Central Arkansas Christian School with a 6 p.m. dinner and live auction on Saturday, followed by an 8 p.m. boot-scootin' concert by Kathy Mattea.

Tickets for the dinner/auction/concert package are \$100; for the open-seating concert alone, tickets are \$20. Terminix will sponsor the evening.

Golfers from around the state will tee off May 20-21 during the "Bolo Bash" tournament at Chenal Country Club, sponsored by Baldwin & Shell Construction Co., owned by Ginny and Bob Shell. Heflin is signed up to play along with his sons and their grandfathers.

On May 22, sponsor Stephens Inc. and host store Kristin Chase is bringing designer Nicole Miller to the Gilbreath Center on Baptist's Little Rock campus for "Health and High Fashion." Those with \$40 tickets will attend an 11 a.m. reception, then get a look at her signature style during a runway show after a noon luncheon.

Heflin says his job as "Bolo Bash" general chairman is "pretty cushy," compared to the way chairmen, vice chairmen, committee members and other sponsors have worked to bring the event together.

The goal of this team effort is to raise \$200,000 for Baptist Health's Grant Awards Program, through which hospitals in the Baptist system submit proposals for grants to improve patient services.

Heflin likes the service aspect of working on the board. He mentions projects like Operation Care, a joint effort with other community organizations that offered a weekend of health screenings and medical services to homeless people. A second Operation Care is scheduled for the weekend of Sept. 21.

"To me, that's what Baptist Health is all about," he says, adding, "We want to do health care in a way that is pleasing to God."

Bottom line, though, "It's about health care, not religion." Serving on the board requires a lot of time, he adds, so "Everybody who's on that board wants to be there, and is looking at what is in the best interest of the community."

They also look at their mission "with a businessperson's eye," trying to give more value for fewer dollars.

"That's the name of the game," he says.

It's also the same name he's tried to give to his business. "We want to provide quality service," he says. "Our people are trained to have a 'yes ma'am, no ma'am' mentality, which is what service is all about."

Terminix technicians attend monthly training meetings in each of the company's service regions to keep up with industry advances.

As he talks about the success of his company, Heflin turns the spotlight away from himself and onto his staff -- most of whom have been employed by Terminix for many years -- and his father, Jay, who remains involved in the business; "He's still the man," Heflin smiles.

Jay Heflin was one of 13 children, born in Mississippi and reared in Oak Grove, La. When he moved to Little Rock in 1938, he went to work for the Memphis-based E.O. Bruce Lumber Co. hoping to become a salesman. But his bosses thought he was too young to sell anything.

A few years earlier, as termites had a picnic feasting on Bruce's wood products, people had started to think the company was selling inferior merchandise. So chemists on staff developed the first termiticides in 1927, and Bruce Terminix was born.

"But they didn't want to do termite control. They wanted to do hardwood floors," Heflin explains. The company started franchising its termite control part of the business.

At a Bruce company picnic, Jay Heflin met the man who had bought the Arkansas Terminix franchise. He then landed himself a job selling termite control work.

"Dad was a good salesman," Heflin explains, "but the owner wasn't able to pay him. So he paid him by giving him part-ownership in the business."

In 1949, Jay Heflin built his wife, Lynn, and sons Johnny and Boo, a four-room, 800-square-foot cinder block house on a piece of his 40-acre plot where the headquarters stands today. The elder Heflins have added on to those four rooms and continue to live there.

Johnny Heflin's father put him to work when he was 6 years old, busting tree stumps with a hammer and an ax. "He worked when he was a kid, and he thought I should work," Heflin recalls. "I got a nickel a stump."

When Heflin was 12, he graduated to hauling hay. He started "crawling houses," or inspecting for insects, in 1962, and continued to do inspections until a little more than 10 years ago. The hard work didn't turn him off to his father's business; in fact, he was still in high school when he decided to make Terminix his career, too.

"I grew up being taught that God has a plan for everybody," says Heflin, whose brother is the chairman of the Old Testament department at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. "I thought my special calling was to be in business. My skills were along those lines. My Dad has always been my role model, so I decided this is what I wanted to do."

Some of Heflin's friends from Central High work with him today. Tim Irby handled Heflin's advertising through Tim Irby Advertising for about 15 years, until October when he became associate director of marketing at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences.

He continues to buy television and radio spots for Heflin, even though Terminix International can place ad time, too.

"He keeps me because I'm his friend," says Irby, adding that one of Heflin's most outstanding character traits is his loyalty to his friends. "I find that rare in individuals today."

Heflin is "a very, very honest, approachable person you like immediately," Irby says. "He is really one truly fine gentleman. An old-fashioned, Southern gentleman."

Heflin also met his wife while the two were students at Central. They attended Ouachita Baptist University at Arkadelphia and were married after graduation in 1967. When Heflin completed a master's of business administration at the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville in 1969, they moved to Little Rock where he went to work for his dad. "I like people," says Heflin. Conducting inspections in towns such as Morrilton, Batesville, Newport, Searcy and Brinkley, "I used to knock on doors, cold selling with graph paper in one hand and a contract book in the other."

In those early days, Heflin drove a car with a trademark Terminix bug on top. He used to crawl out from under houses to find children climbing on his car to get a closer look at the interesting insect.

He says Sharon drove their sons to school in his car, too. A parade of youngsters would wave excitedly when she drove up -- but, alas, the enthusiastic greeting was more for the bug than the crew in the car.

As the company grew, Heflin began to spend more time building the business from corporate headquarters. He also continued to invest his time in community projects and in supporting the church he grew up in and his family attends, Second Baptist.

"When God has gifted you, you need to give back," he believes. "If we've been successful, we need to give back to our fellow man as generously as possible."

A past chairman of the Metropolitan YMCA board, Heflin is still a member of the Y's Foundation Board. He's been on the board of trustees at OBU, where he was president of the student senate, and serves as national chairman for the OBU "Window of Opportunity" capital campaign, with a goal of raising \$40 million in three years -- "and we're well on our way."

Heflin is also chairman of the strategic planning committee on the board of the Central Arkansas Radiation Therapy Institute. "I've got a real appreciation for health care," he says, "and for what radiation therapy can do for people."

In 1985, during a routine physical exam, Heflin was diagnosed with chronic myelogenous leukemia. He learned through reading about the slowly-acting, terminal disease that once it reaches what's called blastic crisis stage -- usually three to five years after diagnosis -- those who have it may only live six or eight weeks.

A friend sent Heflin an article about the experimental bone marrow transplant program at the University of California at Los Angeles, directed by Dr. Richard Champlin. Doctors there were learning how to use transplants to cure many blood disorders including CML, so Heflin's doctor helped him set up an appointment in August 1985 to be tested as a potential transplant candidate.

"My philosophy had always been that God helps those who help themselves. If there's an opportunity, take that opportunity," he says. "If I was going to die, I wanted my boys to see me fighting." When Heflin was accepted into the program, the doctors' next order of business was to find a marrow donor. "A sibling is the best chance for a match, but that's still a 1-in-4 chance," he says. "I have one brother. And he was a perfect match."

After the Heflins returned to Los Angeles that November for the transplant, Johnny Heflin stayed in the hospital seven weeks getting well.

"It certainly made me appreciate every morning more than I did before," he says. After surviving the ordeal, "It becomes more valuable to you to help people. I take a lot of enjoyment in doing that."

The Heflins set an example of service for their sons, just as Johnny Heflin is teaching them about his business. Both work in offices just up the hall from him at Terminix when they're not out crawling houses and servicing contracts.

"They give 110 percent and I couldn't do it without them," Heflin says. For instance, Jay has devised a computer system for better tracking inventory, and Marc has revamped the phone system. "Someday they'll be doing my job, but they've got to learn it first."

Heflin says people used to ask him how he could work in a family business and get along so well with his father. He would reply that if the father was mature enough, the relationship would work out just fine.

Now that he's the father in question, how does he answer that query? "Well," he says, grinning, "if the children are mature enough ..."

Arkansas Democrat-Gazette (Little Rock, AR)

Date: May 5, 1996

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