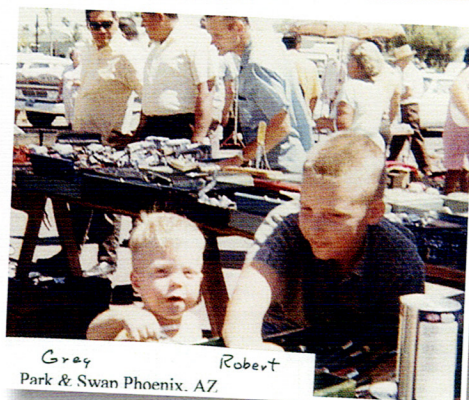


Images courtesy of Fisher's Tools



**A THIRD-GENERATION FAMILY TREASURE:
FISHER'S TOOLS**
CARLY HANSON

Since he was in diapers, Stephen Fisher has been part of his family's tool business in one way or another. However, he has a bit more responsibility these days as vice president. "I was most definitely born into the business," Stephen said. "I even joke that I was 'created' for the business. My mom has a picture of me as an infant playing around in the showroom from many years ago." While some people think carefully before working with family, Stephen always knew he belonged at the company and wanted to take over for his father one day.

Fisher's Tools & Handles, aka Fisher's Tools, started three generations ago in 1964 when Stephen's grandfather, Howard Fisher, sold hammer handles at the Phoenix Park 'n Swap, using his garage as a warehouse for several years. "The reason he started the business was that he suffered a back injury while working as a heavy-equip-

ment operator," Stephen said. "He needed to provide for his family, and he was an avid woodworker, so he decided to use his woodworking skills to pay the bills."

Howard and his wife, Georgia Fisher, saved up and bought a brick-and-mortar location in Tempe on North Scottsdale Road and East Gilbert Drive. After that property was sold by eminent domain, the business moved to its current location in 1989, just a couple of miles away at East 3rd Street and South Smith Road.

"We started with an 8,000 square-foot building that was half-showroom and half-warehouse. Every 10 years since then, we've doubled our property size," Stephen said. Today, Fisher has 64,000 square feet of warehouse and showroom space and sells over 20,000 unique items from over 400 manufacturers and vendors. Their most popular items include power and electrician tools, as well as gas equipment. "We're known for having DeWalt, Milwaukee, and Makita power tools, Klein for our electrician's tools, and Stihl for our chainsaws and cut-off machines," Stephen said.

Top left: Howard Fisher at Fisher's Tools booth at the Phoenix Park 'n Swap meet, 1968.
Top right: Stephen Fisher holding the clipboard his grandfather made after retirement in 2002, from wood from his family farm, 2021.
Above: Greg and Robert Fisher at Fisher's Tools booth at the Phoenix Park 'n Swap meet, 1969.

"These tools are very high quality, and a lot of them are made in America, which is something we and our customers enjoy very much."

While Stephen always knew he'd work for Fisher and eventually take on a leadership role, it didn't pan out exactly how he imagined. "I was working my way through the business since about the age of 12, starting in warehouse and then moving through to sales, and was starting to get into our website and administration positions when everything changed," he said. "Unfortunately, four years ago, my father, Greg Fisher, passed away unexpectedly. It nearly plunged the business into darkness, but my mom and I decided we would take on the responsibility of the business and have continued to run it since then."

Today, Stephen's role as vice president is improving operations through technology to ensure Fisher runs as efficiently as possible. Stephen's mother, Diane Fisher-Brunson, is president, secretary, and treasurer, and his sister, Jessica Fisher, helps assemble materials and takes care of odds and ends around the shop. His entire family has worked for or is currently working for Fisher, from Howard and Georgia to their three sons and even some of Stephen's cousins. "But we aren't alone, and we could never do this alone," he said. "We have a great team of 35 employees who help us with this company as well. This company truly would not be here without the help of the people who have dedicated their time to helping and working for the business."

And even though some Fisher employees aren't blood family, they might as well be. Stephen describes the motto for their company culture as "united under one common problem." "Everyone at this business is here to help each other and to unite together to get through the problems that we face every day," he said. "2020, the year of COVID-19, was where I really saw this company come together as people were getting sick. We would all step up and work harder to ensure the business was taken care of. I truly feel that nearly every employee here has the best interest of the company in mind for everything they do."

Stephen is proud of the Mom-and-Pop atmosphere that sets Fisher apart from

Top right: D&K, a general contractor, lifts a steel beam into place at Fisher's Tools new building in Tempe, 1989.

Below: A Caterpillar trackhoe lifts an underground storage tank into place as part of Fisher's Tools new expansion in Tempe, 2009.



some other tool sellers. He says it's not a corporate entity that requires its employees to speak or act a certain way. Stephen encourages them - especially younger ones - to simply be themselves because it brings joy to the customers and creates lasting relationships. "I can't tell you how many times I've seen one of my guys talking with a customer and asking about the family and how their health is," he said.

Another point of pride is the company's expansion over the years, which continued in 2019 when Fisher added a 32,000 square-foot warehouse to its operation. While it was good news for business, it also meant Fisher could serve its customers

that much more. "By being a larger company with more space to store inventory, we have the opportunity to buy products in large batches and lower prices that can then be relayed to our customers," Stephen said. "Our inventory is our best asset, and most of our competitors have small warehouses, so we can take care of the larger companies, especially when they ask us for something like 50 of a single type of grinding tool."

The future of Fisher's Tools is undoubtedly apparent in Stephen's eyes. He and his family will continue to grow the business, just as they have for the last 50 years. They'll keep building lasting relationships with their customers, trying out new tools, and growing their selection. It's also crucial to Stephen to continue the family legacy, which is the most special part of all to him.

"I work for Fisher's Tools because it's what my dad did, and it's what his dad did. It's what our entire family has been doing for three generations," he said. "When I have a tough day, I think about my grandfather and my father looking down on me smiling because I'm continuing with the family's dream, and that always helps me get over the hurdle I have."

He also looks forward to potentially providing more jobs for hardworking families as Fisher grows. "My mother and I have so much pride in this company. I mean, how could we not? Our name is on the building! I wake up extremely lucky and blessed every day to be able to continue what my grandfather and my father created."



Images courtesy of Fisher's Tools