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Downtown Dayton

H. Gerstner & Sons a business going back 4 generations

"We're swimming in nepotism," joked Jane Campbell, a third-generation member of Dayton cabinetmaker H. Gerstner & Sons. She and five other family members now run this "treasure chest" of a cabinet company (pun intended). All six grew up in Oakwood and today even live near each other on Grandon, Coolidge and Hadley Avenues.

H. Gerstner & Sons has been in existence for more than 100 years, founded in 1906 by Harry Gerstner. After leaving high school at age 17, Gerstner signed on as a woodworking apprentice with a local company at a starting salary of six cents an hour. Upon completion of his four-year apprenticeship, he received a \$100 bonus and was then earning ten cents an hour – top wages for a journeyman woodworker in the Dayton area.

During his apprenticeship, Gerstner began crafting a tool chest – for himself – in his off hours at night. It took a year to complete the chest, but it was so perfectly crafted that a neighbor,

captivated by its efficiency, strength, practicality and quality, asked young 22-year-old Gerstner

Once a year Gerstner opens the doors of its downtown Dayton factory to the public for its annual one-day sale. This year's sale is scheduled for Saturday, October 4 from 9am to 4pm. Items for sale include the last remaining models of the 100th anniversary collector's chest from 2006 as well as a wide variety of the company's other tool chests, roller benches, workstations, jewelry chests, attaché cases, hobby chests and display cases.

to build one for him. That simple request inspired the beginning of this 102-year-old Dayton company, which is now the only surviving maker of crafted wood tool chests in the United States.

At age 22, Harry Gerstner took the \$100 bonus he had received as an apprentice and started his own

company – H. Gerstner & Sons. Today the fourth generation of Gerstner lineage holds the reins of the company.

When Gerstner started the company, he had no sons. In fact, he wasn't even married. He decided to name his company H. Gerstner & Sons in honor of his father Herman, who had introduced him to woodworking. He also thought the name sounded more "established" and hoped to someday have his own sons to bring into the business. (Harry later married but, ironically, had three daughters.) Gerstner was a family business from its inception. Harry's father, his two brothers and two sisters all worked there. Upon Harry Gerstner's retirement, the second generation of this family-owned business took over. During the ensuing years, two of Harry's three daughters and their respective husbands assumed the helm. Eldest daughter Charlotte Gerstner married John A. Campbell, who worked at the company for 23 years from 1938 to 1961. Youngest daughter Harriet Gerstner's husband Harold

See **Gerstner** on page 13



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