

Although often overshadowed
by his father's success,
Paul B. Latshaw has made
a name for himself as an
accomplished superintendent

BY LARRY AYLWARD, EDITOR

His Own Man

Biography

Name: Paul B. Latshaw (the "B" stands for Burdette)

Age: 37

Years as superintendent at Oak Hill CC: 4.5

Previous position as superintendent: Merion GC, 1992-1998

Education: Bachelor's degree in agricultural science from Penn State University in 1989; completed Turfgrass Management Program at PSU in 1990; Master's degree in management from Rosemont College, 1999.

Career highlights: Hosting this year's PGA Championship, hosted the 50th U.S. Girl's Junior Championship at Merion in 1998.

Wife: Ann Louise, married for almost 11 years

Children: David, 10; and J.T., 7

Favorite sports movie: *Rocky*

Favorite recreational activity: Ice hockey

If weren't for his father's clout, he surely wouldn't hold the prominent title he does at one of the top golf courses in the country.

Paul B. Latshaw is aware of such dubious talk about him. He knows there are those in the industry who believe the only reason he's the manager of golf courses and grounds at Oak Hill CC, site of this month's PGA Championship in Pittsford, N.Y., is because of his dad's influence.

Of course, Latshaw's father, Paul R., is hailed as one of the greatest superintendents ever. Now retired as a superintendent but keeping busy as a consultant, Paul R. worked at Augusta National, Oakmont CC and Winged Foot GC, among other great classical golf courses. He's a legend in the golf course maintenance business.

Paul B. sits at his large, cluttered office desk inside the club's weathered maintenance facility and talks candidly about how he has strived to make a name for himself while working in the shadow of his father. Paul B.'s friendly face, with its warm but penetrating eyes, appears pensive when he talks about his dad.

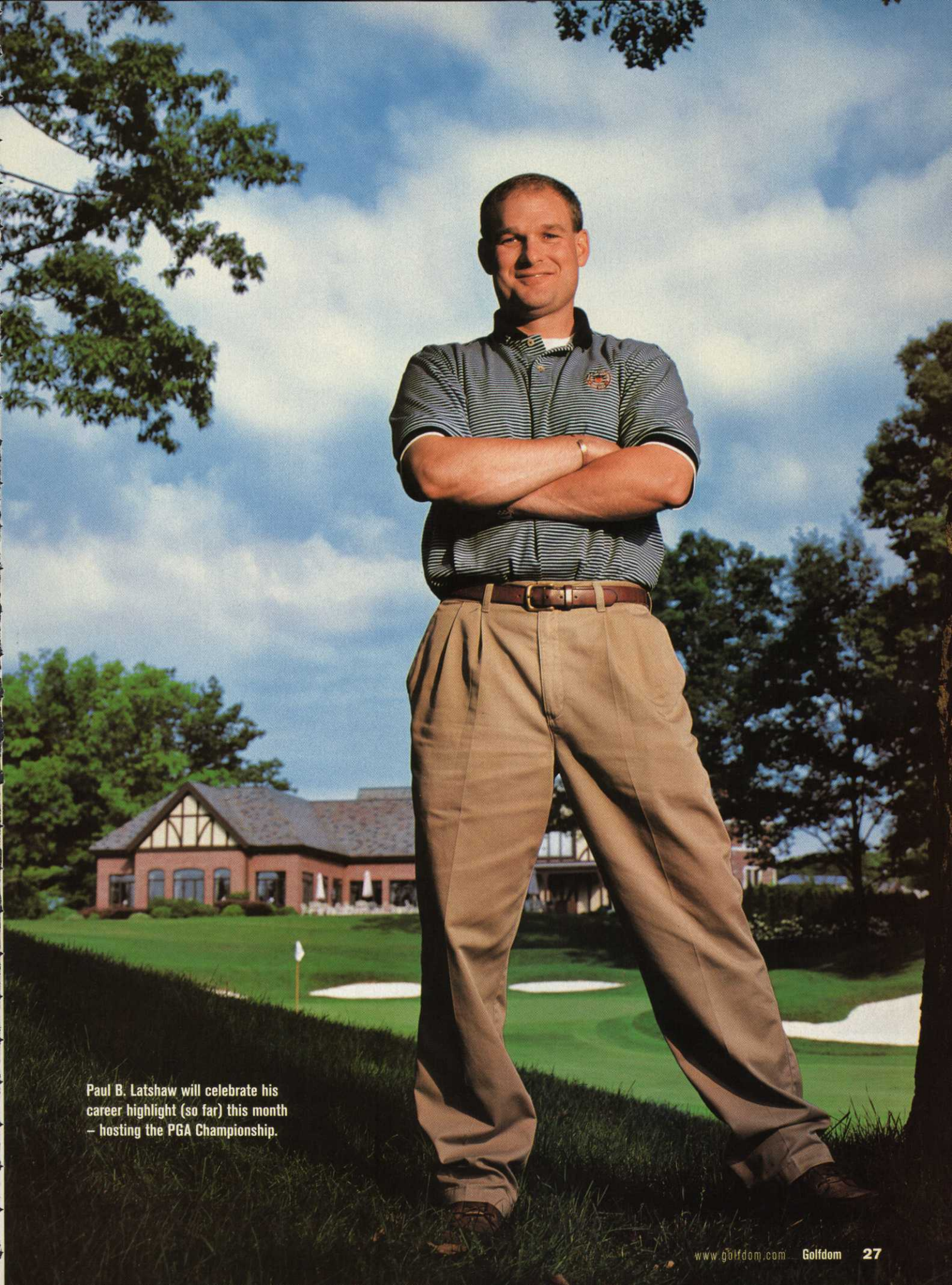
"A lot of what I've achieved gets overshadowed because of who my father is," Paul B. says in a businesslike tone.

The son is following in the father's footsteps of tending turf at high-profile classical golf courses. In 1992, when he was only 26, Paul B. landed his first job as a superintendent at Merion GC, the century-old classic in Ardmore, Pa. He joined the renowned Oak Hill CC, a 1924 Donald Ross design, in 1999.

But Paul B. has been an easy target for the detractors who claim his dad pulled a few strings to land him the jobs at the prestigious courses. He wouldn't be human if he said the talk didn't bother him.

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Paul B. Latshaw will celebrate his career highlight (so far) this month – hosting the PGA Championship.

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"I can't control what people think," the 37-year-old says in his soft-spoken voice. "I can only control my performance."

Paul B. is also not about to let such talk get in the way of the heartfelt relationship he has with his father, the man he says is the person he looks up to most in his life. Paul B. is his dad's biggest admirer, hailing him as "the Michael Jordan of superintendents."

His comment prompts an interesting observation. Michael Jordan's son will never get a free pass to the National Basketball Association because of his father's influence on the profession. It's simple: If Jordan's son doesn't have game, he won't play in the NBA.

The same is true in the golf course mainte-

nance business. Paul B. surely wouldn't be in the final stages of getting Oak Hill ready for golf's greatest players in the world if he didn't know anything about agronomics.

The people who know Paul B. and have worked with him say he's an accomplished superintendent with a take-no-prisoners work ethic. They say he's making a name for himself in the business without any help from his father.

"There's no better superintendent that I've ever seen," says Eric Rule, the general manager at Oak Hill for the past 14 years. "He is so passionate about what he does."

John Zimmers, superintendent of Oakmont CC in Pittsburgh and Paul B.'s good friend, says Latshaw never wanted nor expected any special

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Staying Put

Paul R. Latshaw was superintendent at several of the greatest golf courses in the world, including Augusta National, Oakmont CC, Winged Foot GC and Congressional CC. Needless to say, Latshaw was one of Ryder Trucks' best rental customers.

Living a nomadic life is common in the golf course maintenance business. Hey, you have to go where the jobs are.

But Latshaw made sure to stay in one location when his son, Paul B., was growing up. That was in Pittsburgh, where Paul R. was superintendent at Oakmont for 14 years. Paul B. attended grade school and high school in Pittsburgh, the city he calls "home."

"I think he had opportunities to leave [for other jobs], but it was more important for him to stay at [Oakmont] while I finished high school," Paul B. says.

As manager of golf courses and grounds for Oak Hill CC in Pittsford, N.Y., Paul B. is aware of the mobile lifestyle that is part of his profession. But the 37-year-old, who has two boys ages 10 and 7, doesn't want his profession to uproot their lives.

Paul B. says he hopes to stay at Oak Hill for the foreseeable



COURTESY OF THE LATSHAW FAMILY

He's a chip off the ol' blocks. Paul B. (left) says he has learned a lot about work ethic, responsibility and being a good father from his mother, Phyllis, and his father, Paul R.

future and live in the Rochester area, which he says is a great place to raise a family. Despite the long hours of the job, especially while gearing up Oak Hill's East Course for this year's PGA Championship, Latshaw says spending quality time with his boys, David and J.T., is at the top of his priority list.

"I don't want time to slip by and not be part of their lives," he says. "The next thing you know they're out of the house and you missed that opportunity."

Latshaw's sons occasionally visit Oak Hill. But Latshaw will not prod his boys to go into the business, as his dad didn't pressure him to do so.

"My oldest son is artistic, so maybe he'll be a golf course architect," Latshaw says. "But maybe he'll be an accountant, too. That's OK with me."

— Larry Aylward, Editor

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When Latshaw arrived at Oak Hill, the club decided to sink some major money into improved drainage and irrigation, among other things.

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favors from his father or anyone else for that matter.

“Paul has very high expectations, and he doesn’t want anything handed to him,” Zimmers says. “He wants to prove himself. It’s not fair for people to take pot shots at him.”

Paul B. has wanted to be a superintendent since he was 12. That’s when he started taking an interest in his father’s career — and became enamored with it.

It was the late 1970s when the Latshaw family was living in Pittsburgh and Paul R. was superintendent at Oakmont, one of the greatest courses in the country with one of the most demanding memberships. For Paul R., that meant early to bed and early to rise because he was working such long days. That meant Paul B. didn’t get to see his father much.

“I knew if I wanted to spend time with him, I had to go to work with him,” Paul B. says.

So that’s what he did. But Paul B. *wanted* to go to work with his dad, and he begged his dad to let him go to Oakmont.

“It was never my dad saying, ‘You’re coming to work with me today,’” Paul B. says. “It was always me asking, ‘Dad, can I come to work with you today?’”

Even though Paul R. worked long hours, he and his only son spent a lot of time together

at Oakmont, where Paul R. worked as superintendent for 14 years.

“We spent a lot of time together. It just wasn’t in the traditional sense, like throwing the baseball or the football in the backyard,” Paul B. says. “While it was in the work setting, our time together was quality time together.”

Paul B. was born in Jackson, Mich., where his father began his career as a superintendent. Then the family moved to Cleveland for four years when Paul R. got a job at Shaker Heights CC. Then it was on to Pittsburgh.

It was in 1978 when Oakmont hosted the PGA Championship that Paul B. began to understand the magnitude of his father’s job. He witnessed the glamour and glitz that comes with a Major tournament and realized what it meant to the community. “I realized what my dad did was really special.”

Paul B. was hooked. During high school, he spent the summers working at Oakmont. He got a taste of the demands of the profession by working 70 to 80 hours a week. He didn’t see his friends much, but he learned a lot about hard work. “I formed a solid work ethic.”

After high school, Paul B. enrolled at Penn State University and studied agricultural science and turfgrass management. He says his dad never discouraged him from becoming a superintendent, but he got the impression his dad

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thought he'd be better off in a profession that wasn't as demanding.

"I didn't encourage him to get into the business," Paul R. says. "But when he decided to go into it, I told him what I thought he needed to do."

In the summer of 1985, Paul R. recommended that his son work as an intern for superintendent and industry veteran Dick Bator at Pine Valley GC in New Jersey. It was a test, of sorts, to see if Paul B. could withstand the toughest the industry had to offer. Bator was like a drill sergeant, and he wasn't afraid to get in workers' faces.

But Paul B. survived what he calls "Bator's Boot Camp," and says the experienced motivated him even more to go into the profession. "I never considered doing anything else," he says.

Paul B. says he learned about perseverance and passion from Bator, who now works as a consultant in the industry.

"He had a tremendous work ethic," Bator says. "And he was a sponge for learning."

In 1986 and 1987, Paul B. worked as a summer intern for superintendent David Stone at The Honors Course in Ooltewah, Tenn. He says Stone is an excellent teacher. Paul B. then worked briefly for his father at Augusta after graduating from Penn State. He went to work as an assistant for his father when Paul R. left Augusta to become superintendent at Wilmington CC in Montchanin, Del. Paul B. stayed there for three years before getting the job at Merion in 1992, where he replaced Bator.

That's when people began to talk. Nobody in his mid-20s should be hired as the superintendent of Merion, the critics said. Paul B.'s father must have had a hand in the hiring.

Paul R. refused to visit his son at Merion until several months after he started the job.

"There was no question in my mind he could do the job," Paul R. says. "But I didn't want to go there because I didn't want people to think I was helping him."

It was Bator who recommended that Paul B. succeed him at Merion. Bator says he was the clear choice, even though he was only 26. "Youth doesn't mean anything," Bator says. "It's about maturity, drive and the willingness to learn."

"Maybe [people think] I got a break, but I guarantee you it doesn't matter who your father is," Paul B. says. "If you don't perform, you'll lose your job."

Oak Hill's Upgrade

Since Paul B. Latshaw joined Oak Hill CC in 1999, a lot of time and money has been spent readying the course for the PGA Championship, set for Aug. 11-17.

In 2001, Oak Hill installed a new Rain Bird Cirrus Central Control irrigation system on its East Course, site of the tournament. The triple-row system, featuring 1,348 heads, replaced an outdated single-row system.

"The fairways are a lot firmer and more consistent because we have much better control of the water," says Latshaw, noting the club also installed a new Flowtronex pump station.

The club also spent about \$900,000 on drainage, featuring more than seven miles of new pipe. About 75 percent of the bunkers received new drainage.

Every bunker on the course was rebuilt with the bunkers' faces rolled down as far as they could go. All fairways were recontoured and nine new tees were added. The course was also extended 230 yards.

Oak Hill purchased 4.1 acres of new land near the 17th hole. The extra space will help immensely to control the flow of galleries, Latshaw says.

The key to getting ready for the tournament has been hard work, says Latshaw, who salutes his crew's solid work ethic.

"That's one of the things I've been very fortunate with — I've had great, great people working for me," he says. "That's one of the unique things about this business. When it gets into people's blood, they really become passionate about it." — L.A.



LARRY ATWOOD

He must have done something right because he stayed at Merion for almost seven years. If he weren't a good superintendent, Merion's members would have run him out long before that.

Oak Hill approached Paul B. about coming there in late 1998. Knowing that Oak Hill had booked the PGA and that Merion would probably never host a Major because of its size, Latshaw made the switch.

"Leaving Merion was probably the toughest decision of my life," he says. "But I've wanted to do a Major ever since I was 12."

It was 25 years ago that Paul B. experienced his first Major while working for his father at Oakmont. Ironically, that PGA Championship was also his father's first Major.

Oak Hill's East Course, where the PGA Championship will be played, needed repairs when Paul B. arrived. At that time, the club's brass also decided to spend money on some major renovations, including drainage, irrigation and tree removal. Rule says Latshaw's

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Paul B. Latshaw (left) credits his crew, including superintendent Tom Bailey, for working extra hard to get the course in shape for the tournament.

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hiring to oversee the projects was vital. “If we would have given another superintendent the same budget, I don’t know if we would have seen the same results.”

So far, so good, Paul B. says about Oak Hill, which hosted the Ryder Cup in 1995 and the USGA Amateur Championship in 1998. The club surveyed its members last year to ask them if they were satisfied with the conditioning of the course. Ninety-eight percent said they were “very satisfied” or “satisfied.” That compares to a much lower percentage of members who answered the same survey question in 1998.

But Paul B., who seems to be his own worst critic, says the course will not be in as good of shape as he would like to have it for the tournament. “I feel good about what we’ve accomplished, but I’d like to have another year to prepare.”

When Paul B. says his achievements are overshadowed by his father’s success, he doesn’t say it with even a hint of bitterness. He accepts it for what it is. “I still think I’m perceived as the son of Paul R. Latshaw, but I also think I’m perceived as being a good superintendent,” he says.

Paul B., who holds a master’s degree in management, says he’s a good superintendent partly because he learned so much from his father, especially about leadership, which he considers one of his strong points.

“I saw my dad as my father, but I also saw

him as an unbelievable leader of people,” he says. “He was one of those guys people like to rally around.”

Maybe that had something to do with Paul R.’s work ethic.

“My dad is a workaholic,” Paul B. says. “He’s the most driven person I’ve ever met.”

And he had a special talent for grooming golf courses. There were many times when father wowed son with his work, Paul B. says. One event that sticks in his mind was the 1997 U.S. Open at Congressional CC in Bethesda, Md., where Paul R. worked as superintendent in the mid-1990s.

“I would defy anyone to have a better-conditioned golf course than Congressional [that year],” Paul B. says. “It was near perfect.”

What impresses him most about his father is that he was able to duplicate his success at some of the most prominent clubs in the country, where being the superintendent is often a pressure-packed job.

“He surely didn’t take the path of least resistance,” Paul B. says. “It’s one thing to achieve success at one place, but to duplicate it at multiple places at such a high level ... that’s the criteria for being great.”

Paul B. says he doesn’t like to compare himself with other superintendents, especially his father. “What [my father] has done ... probably no one else is ever going to do.”

But that’s not to say that Paul B. is not striving to be in that same “elite” class of superintendents. Although he says has a ways to go to achieve that status, some people already think he has already made it.

“Paul B. is probably a better superintendent now than me and his old man put together,” Bator says.

“He’s the best superintendent in the business — from agronomics to business to management to mentoring,” says Oakmont’s Zimmers.

Paul R. and his wife, Phyllis, will attend the PGA Championship and be at their son’s side during the hosting of his first Major tournament, the pinnacle to date of his still-young career.

Paul R., the veteran of hosting Majors, may offer his son some advice. But it’s a good bet he’ll stay mostly out of his son’s way and be content to play the role of the proud father.

“He tried his best to prove he could do this job on his own,” Paul R. says of his son. “And he has done it on his own.” ■