

David Pursell jokes that he was born with a fertilizer shovel in his mouth. The 46-year-old has progressed to CEO of the family business, Pursell Technologies Inc. (PTI), begun in 1904 and known then as the Sylacauga Fertilizer Co.

David began working for the company when he was 12 and his father, Jimmy, was in charge. He has been running the show since 1997 when his father stepped aside and became chairman.

One could say there's gold in those slow-release fertilizer pellets that PTI has mastered and marketed. David has been living a good life while tending to the business in rural Alabama. He drives a neat car, lives in a nice house, dresses in fine clothes, and works in a spacious office that overlooks the 18th fairway of the sensational golf course on the company's property. Oh, yeah, he owns some nice clubs and can hit the ball pretty well, too.

I guess you could say he's living the American dream to its fullest. I guess you could say, as the song says, "Life's been good to him so far."

"People think I've got it made," David is not afraid to admit. "They say, 'You work here, you live here, and you play here.'"

David admits it's a "pretty cool" lifestyle he leads. But he also knows there's more to life than driving a cool car and possessing a decent golf game.

"They don't bring that deep-down satisfaction that I need to survive in my life," he says of the material things in his life.

David fetches a photo of his six children — four daughters and two sons — and shows it to me. The job, the car, the house, the golf course and all the pleasures they provide don't bring half the satisfaction to his life as his children do.

There is a distinct difference between pleasure and satisfaction, David notes. Pleasure is wonderful but can lack depth. Satisfaction is wonderful but runs soul deep. "It's where you find the fullness of joy," David says softly.

Don't be mistaken that David isn't grateful for his work and what it has provided him. He takes the family business very

Family Comes First for Family Biz CEO

BY LARRY AYLWARD



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seriously. When it comes to his job, David's co-workers will tell you that he's a perfectionist and a stickler for detail. Make no mistake: David wants the business to succeed as badly as anyone.

But he wants his children to succeed even more. And while the success of the business is measured in part by dollars, the success of his children is measured on a more benevolent scale. Given the choice between securing record profits for the company or raising his children to be good and righteous people . . . well, it's just not a choice for a David. Put it this way: You'll never read about David Pursell the CEO quitting his job to spend more time with his family. He's doing that now.

"My children are my true legacy," David says convincingly. "It's not this fertilizer business."

And so David sets out daily to nurture the relationships with each of his children. He strives to be a better parent. He longs to form a special bond with each of his kids.

In June, David traveled to northern California with one of his twin 14-year-old sons, Martin, to attend the JH Ranch, the site of a week-long retreat where David and his son spent some quality time together. But this is not the quality time that compares to attending a baseball game together and sharing a bag of peanuts. We're talking quality time at a much higher level, as in David and Martin discussing the purpose of existence and the importance of values in living a respectful life.

In July, David took his other son, Parker, to the JH Ranch. He has now taken all of his children on the retreat. It is a special place, David says, where each child warranted his undivided attention for seven days.

"If you devote 100 percent of your time to

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a child for a long period of time, he or she will start to open up to you, and your communication will just blossom," David says. "That's what you want."

There are signs in David's office of such communication occurring. On the wall above and behind David's computer is a collection of yellow and pink Post-It notes from his children. One note, from his daughter, Peggy, reads: "Dad ... you are an absolutely amazing father. Thanks for all you do for your family."

Another note, from his daughter, Ramsey, reads: "Hey daddy, I love you! Thank you for all you do!"

In some families, it's hard for children to tell their parents they love them and vice versa. But not in the Pursell family, where the words are spoken securely.

David speaks of his oldest child, the 22-year-old Peggy who's a senior at Auburn University. She calls her dad almost daily during the school year. They talk about boys, school and her career.

"She's asking for my advice," David says. "How special is that?"

So special that it should inspire all of us who are parents to form such devoted relationships with our children.

David Pursell and son Martin share a moment together at a retreat in California.



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