

# A POWERFUL BOND

## Auto electric shop's current runs through three generations

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John Beck/Times-Georgian

Johnson's Auto Electric founder Edwin Snead Johnson works on an electric starter Friday afternoon while his son Ralph and grandson Seth look on.

An unobtrusive auto electric shop on Newnan Road is one of the continuing traditions of Carrollton, with three generations working to carry on the legacy of a family business.

Edwin Snead Johnson began the auto electric business shortly after World War II.

He was in the first round of 20-year-olds drafted for the war.

"I got home from the war, didn't know what in the world I was going to do," said Johnson, now 76 years old.

His older brother had part of a building with a little lean-to and the two of them set up in business together with an auto electric store in 1946. Then in 1947, Johnson bought a house on South Park Street across the road from what is now West Georgia Bank. He used the bottom story as a garage and the top rooms to rent to other people.

In 1951, he moved the location of the store to the place where the Georgia Power Company is now located, the Triangle Service Station of Bankhead Highway and Mandville Avenue. In 1952, the store moved to its present location on Newnan Road, but it only had one stall. The center stall was added in 1964 and the truck stall was added in 1972.

The logo painted on the side of the present store has become something of a trademark around Carrollton. It is a picture, originally painted by Jack Ashmore, of a man pushing a car, with the motto, "Don't push it, we can fix it," written underneath.

When Johnson first got started, he made much of the machinery he used in his shop

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by hand, saving thousands of dollars and even creating the first winding machine in Carrollton, a device used to wind and clean copper wire.

He did all of this with a fifth-grade education.

"I quit school and went to work in the fifth grade because Daddy lost everything in the Depression," said Edwin Johnson.

His son, Ralph Edwin Snead Johnson, 46 years old, began working in his father's shop while still in sixth grade. His father bought him and his older brother a mini-bike, and they would work in the store to earn enough money to pay for the gas for the mini-bike. His older brother soon lost interest in the store, but Ralph Johnson kept working through high school, after school and on Saturdays.

He went into the National Guard on active duty in 1970, for a period of six months. After he got out of the army, he came back to his father's store to work full time.

"Working for family is hard. My brother wasn't able to do it. You can't ever lay out of work—he knows when you're sick or not," said Ralph Johnson.

Nevertheless, he found it the most rewarding thing he could do with his life.

"I've been able to do things my brother and sister haven't been able to do—and that's look back on all the years I was able to work with my daddy everyday. I just hope I'm able to have the patience with Seth as my daddy had with me. I don't know if I was this impatient when I was his age," said Ralph Johnson.

Seth, overhearing part of this, replied, "Yeah you were, tell him Paw Paw ..."

Ralph Johnson said he would have been amazed to see how far his father could have gone with a complete education. He told the story of an exhibit the Johnsons had gone to, where a machine called a bushing puller was on display. It cost thousands of dollars, but Edwin Johnson, after one good look at the thing, went back to his shop and made his own working version. It still

works today, better than the newer models that have come out, said Ralph Johnson.

In 1983, Edwin Johnson semi-retired, and Ralph Johnson bought out his father's store. Edwin Johnson comes in now and then to fill-in for someone. His grandson Seth Johnson is the last of the Johnson men until Seth has children of his own. He began working at his grandfather's store when he was 20, about two years ago. Seth attended college for a couple of terms, and then decided he wanted to go into the family business.

"It can be interesting at times, but otherwise I like it. We get to learn more about each other," said Seth Johnson.

He said he would carry the family business tradition on to the next generation if he could, and buy out the store after his father retires.

"I'll probably do the same thing that my dad did for Paw Paw — one day," said Seth Johnson.