

CONNECTICUT LIGHTING CENTERS

Originally, both Arthur and David Director had designs on teaching careers.

The father-son force behind Connecticut Lighting Centers holds great respect for what happens in the classroom and for the people who mold young minds as mirrored by some of their philanthropic initiatives.

Arthur, the company board chairman, actually sampled the classroom experience after his 1952 cum-laude graduation from Central Connecticut State University with a degree in business education.

His son David, now president of the two-location operation that has taken their lighting business to the next level, originally had plans to become a physical education instructor, but instead chose a marketing major at Quinnipiac University, where he earned his diploma in 1981.

Arthur was raised in Norwich, where his father owned a liquor store. Upon graduating from college, he realized that he could not afford to teach, as the starting salary being offered for high school teachers was approximately \$1,800 a year in 1952. Instead, he began applying the business acumen and basics, which he had planned to teach in the classroom, in the for-profit world.



Arthur, David, Edythe Director—the Director Family.

For whatever reason, the Hartford showroom of what was already known as Connecticut Lighting Center was not working out. One of the principals who happened to be David's godfather, cast about for options. His gaze fell upon Arthur, whom he knew was not all that satisfied with the Chevron chapter of his life. Arthur had little or no experience in the lighting business, but was considered very astute in evaluating companies prior to acquisition.

"I took my two-week vacation in August of 1972 to observe and evaluate the business," Arthur recalled. "It certainly was not retail-oriented; it was mismanaged and was on the verge of bankruptcy. However, my gut feeling was that there was great potential. On a handshake, I became a partner and assumed my share of the business's \$250,000 debt."

Total sales for 1972 totaled only \$236,000 with seven employees. Today, aided and abetted by a second location in Southington, Connecticut Lighting Centers do in excess of \$14 million in business a year with 70-plus employees.

Today, Arthur Director has been recognized for his many achievements and contributions in his community, state and business organizations. The ultimate trade recognition was his election to the American Lighting Association's Lighting Hall of Fame.

The ink was hardly dry on David's Quinnipiac cum-laude diploma when he joined the family business full time in 1981. His mother has been part of the business as well, serving as a buyer of lamps and lighting accessories. When the elder Director retired in 1994, moving up to board chairman, David assumed the company presidency.

"I now have the perks job," Arthur said. "I represent the company at all the good things: charity golf tournaments, chamber of commerce affairs and all kinds of community functions"—and at many of the "give-back" events that the Directors support in the communities they serve, such as the annual leadership-development conference for middle-schoolers that the Connecticut Lighting Centers sponsor at Quinnipiac through the Connecticut Association of

For 20 years into the early 1970s, Arthur developed into an executive with the Red Wing Oil Company, a large distributor of gasoline, heating oils and heating equipment—and, later, the Chevron Oil Company that purchased their distributor.

Early on, Arthur kept his connection to schooling, serving as an instructor in the evening adult education program. His wife Edythe, whom he met on the Central Connecticut campus, also did her share of teaching in the VISTA program.

In 1968 Thomas Industries, one of the premier manufacturers and suppliers of lighting fixtures and equipment in the nation, decided on a bold move into the world of retail by building showrooms, which they leased out.

"That was something of a new marketing concept," David said. "Lighting manufacturers and suppliers did not sponsor retail outlets. Thomas was trying something unique."



Schools. The middle school that creates and operates the best leadership program during the academic year receives a cash prize and a statewide award named for Arthur Director.

Father and son have donated tremendous amounts of time and talent to many organizations such as the Rushford Center, the Interfaith Golf Tournament, B'nai B'rith Lodge, Northern Middlesex YMCA, Middletown Rotary Club, Big Brother/Big Sister, youth sponsored organizations, the Jaycees, the United Way, the Better Business Bureau of Connecticut and many other community-service agencies.

"Once you get involved and do a good job at it," Arthur said, "they tend to come back to you when help is needed."

"My father brought me up," said David, who, with his wife Carol, are raising three children—Todd 16, Jenna 13, and Brett 10—with this philosophy: If you are going to take from the community, be prepared to give something back. That was a great lesson."

The sports-loving family accomplishes two objectives—supporting the University of Connecticut's national power basketball programs and sharing their good fortune with youngsters—each holiday season. The company buys 1,000 tickets to a game for children, who might not be able



Since 1968 a Brainard Road landmark.

to afford the price of admission.

With the largest collection of lighting, ceiling fans and home accents in New England, Connecticut Lighting Centers cater to shoppers who like to gain a sense of how what they are buying will look in their homes or work spaces. Instead of being hidden inside warehoused boxes, the selections are within artistic and eye-pleasing view.

Knowledgeable sales personnel guide the customers through glittering arrays. With their impressive inventories and showrooms, if you can't find what you are looking for at their lighting centers, chances are you won't find it at all.

"The retail lighting business today is highly diverse and customer oriented" said David, who believes that the best proof of the centers' "unique niche in the market-place" is to visit his locations after stopping at a "Big Box" outlet.

"Our motto is, 'We sell solutions, not lighting.' People come to us because they have lighting needs, issues or problems, and we can offer solutions, because we have knowledgeable sales personnel, a large inventory of products to offer and displayed showing applications. We help solve their problems and it doesn't cost the customer any more."

David looks forward to heading for his office. "I love what I do," he

said. "It seems to get better and better. This business is dynamic and changing every day. There is nothing static. The challenge is always there. You certainly don't get bored."

The father-son tandem subscribes to the three maxims that too many businesses somehow lose track of in the sprint to bottom-line success.

You are only as good as the people who work for you. Connecticut Lighting's average for employee longevity is nine years, with many in management past the two decade mark.

The biggest mistake a retailer can make is losing touch with what the business is all about and giving the number-crunchers more clout than the people in the trenches.

A customer can very easily become a friend, which is great, because a friend becomes your best advertising medium. And the Directors have the repeat business to prove it.

