



## Passing the Torch

### Johnston's Chimney Sweep stays in the family under new management

Kimber Matzke is nothing but determined to keep 39 years of her family's legacy alive in the local area for decades to come.

She is the current business manager of Johnston's Chimney Sweep, a family-owned business based in York County. Her dad, Jack Johnston, started the business in 1979. "I would always tear up thinking someone else was going to have my dad's legacy and I just didn't want that," Matzke said. "I didn't want anybody else to have what was his and what was in our family for so long." Johnston's Chimney Sweep offers chimney cleaning, repair, inspections and installation. The business also provides services on fireplaces, wood stoves and dryer vents.

Its slogan is the "Best Dang Chimney Sweep in Virginia" and prides itself on honesty, reliability, professionalism and family.



Jack Johnston and his wife Sherry Johnston started the business out of their home off Lakeside Drive 39 years ago. He was in need of a side job while working as firefighter for the York County Fire and Life Safety. The Vermont native got the idea for the business while flipping through a magazine.

"When I first started, I used to get on the phone every night when I got done with work, cold calling," Jack Johnston said. "You could do that then. I would find a neighborhood and just call and call. Then I went around to businesses and made friends."

Matzke recalled watching her father return home from firefighting, change into his chimney sweep uniform and leave again to work for his own business. Jim Johnston said he would only take two days off a month.

"My wife would tell you that from the crack of dawn until dark at night I was out," Jack Johnston explained. His hard work didn't go unnoticed. Johnston's Chimney Sweep quickly established major clients including Colonial Williamsburg, the College of William and Mary as well as Busch properties, in addition to private residences and other buildings.

"The people who are in charge of the restored buildings and hotel properties (at Colonial Williamsburg) have changed over the years, but the company that has cleaned those has not changed," Matzke said. "That's a real feather in dad's cap."

While Jack Johnston was responsible for the chimney sweeping services, his wife Sherry Johnston served as the business manager. She was in charge of bookkeeping, running the home office and paying the business's bills.

Sherry Johnston retired in June 2017 after 34 years and passed the position down to her daughter. Jack Johnston is also no longer involved in day-to-day operations, but he still serves as his daughter's mentor. The business employs two full-time technicians with over 12 years experience.



"She's so dedicated with this, which is good. It's hers," her dad proudly stated. Matzke, a former teacher, took over Johnston's Chimney Sweep in July 2017. She still operates the business from the family's home in Grafton and is looking to grow it even further.

She recently created a website for Johnston's Chimney Sweep to give the business an online presence. She also moved the bookkeeping from paper to electronic and set new goals for the future.

According to her, she hopes to increase clientele, promote continuing education for their two employees, add additional services and continue their positive reputation with current clients.

"I want to maintain the fact that this is Jack Johnston's legacy and this is his business," Matzke said. "Letting all of our customers know that we are a small, family-owned business that prides ourselves on family tradition, values and the core of that."



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