E. F. San Juan

Founder and patriarch Eddie San Juan came to Florida at the turn of the century as a cigar maker. He was good with his hands and would trade cigar rolling for cabinetmaking.

During the 1950s, Eddie San Juan opened a store in Miami selling cabinets and fixtures for high-end homes, banks and department stores. The Waldorf Astoria in New York was a customer. When portable televisions became popular, salesman called upon Eddie to craft custom pieces on castors, an activity that grew into a successful business located in Thomasville, Georgia. In 1976, as Eddie was nearing retirement age, he and his family decided to return to Florida. They acquired a parcel in Youngstown in Bay County, located just off U.S. 231 and next to railroad tracks.

The family established E. F. San Juan, Son Ed, now in his 30s, was ready to lead the family business. His son, Edward, was 13 years old. From a young age, Edward loved being hands-on — sweeping floors, hauling materials, breathing in everything around him — he said he has sawdust in his veins. He learned to operate all of the wood-sharpening machines in the E. F. San Juan shop.

“I love making things, and I love wood, period,” he said. Edward joined his father on the ownership team in the 1980s. His wife, Mary Kathryn, joined as the controller; brother-in-law Buddy Czubaj is the general manager. Today, Edward, 56, oversees the business’s operations while drawing upon degrees he earned at the University of Florida.

“I love that my children are working with me. I’m proud and impressed with what they’ve already learned,”

Other than cutting someone’s grass as a kid, I’ve never worked for anyone else. My wife and I made a decision to sacrifice immediate opportunities knowing we could always go back. It worked, and I've never looked back,” Edward said.

The fourth generation of E. F. San Juan is already taking shape. For the past two years, son Eddie, 26, has worked as the production manager. Daughter Lydia, 22, contributes her flair for design in the cabinetry division, while the youngest, Mario, 13, waits his turn.

“Our family extends to the 80 people who work with us, some for just a few months, but many of them for 30 years. They are also proud of the name E. F. San Juan. They feel that’s them, too.”

In 2018, Hurricane Michael all but destroyed the business. Edward and his father assessed the damage and resolved to rebuild the business to which they have dedicated their lives.

“We both felt we had work to do,” Edward said. “We have an army, and they needed to be led.” After rebounding from the storm’s devastation, Edward was motivated to build on the business’s success.

The family had invested in state-of-the-art technology and equipment to ensure they could consistently deliver quality legacy products. They had embarked on a strategy of hiring fewer, more highly skilled employees and paying them more. Still, Edward wondered how best to grow and perpetuate the business through the next generation. He found the answer when a business colleague recommended he read Traction: Get a Grip on Your Business, a book by Gino Wickman that describes an “entrepreneurial operating system” designed to help businesses achieve long-term growth.

“The idea that we are creating something that is perpetual, something beyond me and my dad that these 80 families can rely on as time goes on, is what I’ve most enjoyed,” Edward said. “What makes me most proud is we’ve created something that matters.”