By Jan Rahn
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One of the oldest businesses in Imperial and Grant has made an ownership change—but no name change.

Adams Lumber Company was purchased Aug. 27 by Leibbrandt Lumber, Inc., dba Adams Lumber Company.

New owners Chad and Amy Leibbrandt of Imperial, who are both Chase County High School graduates, are excited to be at the helm of the successful company that was established 93 years ago.

Adams Lumber is a third-generation business that has been in operation since 1919. The Leibbrandts are anxious to make some changes but will work hard at retaining the company's reputation for outstanding customer service.

While in high school, Chad worked at the Imperial site. The building industry is an area he has always enjoyed.

He received a Bachelor's Degree in industrial distribution at UNK while employed by Builders Warehouse. He worked there for seven years, managing two divisions.

He then traveled extensively for two years as a salesman for Lee Soap Company in Denver. When he and Amy moved back to Imperial he worked with his dad in the car wash business, purchasing it with Ed Cupp in 2006 and renaming it AACE Wash Systems. He spent six years bidding and fixing car washes in three states. Cupp will continue to own and operate AACE Wash Systems, Leibbrandt said.

Amy majored in elementary education and early childhood education at UNK, teaching in Kearney before returning to Imperial.

For now, they will spend most hours in Grant getting to know staff, training and meeting the community's residents.

The company's president, Ron Kent, who headed up the Grant site, is looking forward to retirement but will stay on temporarily to help train the Leibbrandts. His sister, Marcia (Kent) Frerichs, will continue to handle the accounts payable while her husband, Mike Frerichs, will stay on as manager at the Imperial location.

"Being able to learn from the previous owners (Marcia, Mike and Ron) will be so helpful to us," said Amy. "Their knowledge will help with a smooth transition."

One new employee is being hired for an added design center in Imperial. Christine Clevenger will run the design center at the Imperial site and service both locations. All other employees at the Imperial site will continue with the business.

The Leibbrandts have two young children, Carter, seven, in second grade, and five-year-old Addisen, in kindergarten.

Adams Lumber 93 years old

This year marks the 125th anniversary of Perkins County, which was an opportunity for Adams Lumber to provide a historical account of the company's presence in that area.

Adams Lumber had become the oldest continuously-owned family business in Perkins County.

When W.H. (Bill) Adams first arrived in the Grant area, he and his wife, Sarah, doubted they would stay long in the barren, treeless prairie. But 93 years later, until the recent sale of the company, his family continued the lumber business he began in 1919 by establishing yards in Grant and Venango.

The Venango location existed until 1924 when Adams purchased yards in Grainton and Madrid. The Grainton building, which closed in 1952, was moved to the Grant location and is still in use today for storage.

The Madrid yard was managed by Bill's brother, A.C. Adams, until 1950. At that point, the late Arnold Mizner took over the duties, managing the site for 44 years until he retired in 1993.

Madrid's most recent manager, Tom Anderson, who grew up in Imperial, purchased the Madrid location and renamed it Anderson Lumber Company on March 21 of this year.

Bill Adams presided over Adams Lumber Company until the age of 93, even working while wheelchair-bound and living at Grant's Golden Ours Convalescent Home, where his daughter Theone would pick him up every day for work. The other residents at Golden Ours kidded him about being the only resident there who still had a job.

Theone married her Perkins County High School sweetheart, Gerald Kent, who entered the business upon his return from World War II in 1946. Following her father's death in 1975, Theone and husband Gerald became the owners of Adams Lumber, and actively managed the company until semi-retiring in 1986. Adams Lumber Company acquired their Imperial location in 1990, purchasing Chaco from John Fitzgerald and George Hoff. Theone and Gerald Kent's son-in-law, Mike Frerichs, who is married to their daughter, Marcia, became the new manager of the Imperial location. He has been with the company since 1975 after his graduation from the University of Nebraska.

Gerald and Theone Kent's son Ron Kent returned to Grant with his wife, Mary, to work in the family business in 1976, and managed the Grant location until his forthcoming retirement.

Along with lumber and building supplies, Adams has provided a concrete service at the Grant site, which has become increasingly efficient since 1958 when the dry cement was delivered by boxcar in 94-pound bags, 635 per car. The bags would be unloaded by hand and stored in a shed. In 1979, a bulk cement silo was built and in 2001, a computerized cement plant was added to the company.

The company's founder, Bill Adams, served as president of the Nebraska Lumber Dealers Association in 1959, a position his grandson Ron Kent held in 1990, the 100th anniversary year of the association.

Imperial store history

The Imperial lumber yard was built in 1922. F. C. "Fred" Krotter had established a small chain of lumber yards, grain elevators and ranches in southwest Nebraska, including the yard in Imperial.

In the late 1970s, John Fitzgerald and son-in-law George Hoff purchased the yard and renamed it Chaco Lumber and Hardware, combining the words Chase County into the name.

In 1990, the lumber yard was purchased by Adams Lumber, which had other sites in Grant and Madrid.

Open house in Grant next week

An open house will be held at the Adams Lumber store in Grant Wednesday, Sept. 12, from 2 to 4 p.m.

The open house has a dual purpose—for Grant area residents to meet new owners Chad and Amy Leibbrandt and to wish former company president Ron Kent a happy retirement.

The public is invited.

Chad Leibbrandt said they will have an open house in Imperial at a later date.