



David Wilson of Chapman-Wilson Pools, Spas & Home Improvements Inc. sits in one of the spas his company sells.

Staff photo by Cindy Burnham

'Your customers are your boss'

This is one in a series of interviews with business people in the Cape Fear region who share their experiences and thoughts about success. The stories are published the first Sunday of each month.

David Wilson was clocking exhausting hours and putting 100,000 miles per year on his truck while running somebody else's pool company in Greensboro.

So in 1988, when Wilson and his wife, Sandi, saw the chance to open their own business in Fayetteville, they took it.

"I was so worn out from the company that I was working with that I knew that, physically and mentally, I couldn't keep doing it," Wilson said.

"Little did I know that opening your own company would push the envelope a little further."

The past 17 years have been filled with hard work for Wilson. But today Chapman-Wilson Pools, Spas & Home Improvements Inc. boasts a customer base of more than 6,500. It has 22 employees and works regularly with about 30 subcontracting crews out of a location on Hope Mills Road and a newer one on Ramsey Street.

Many homes within a 70-mile radius of Fayetteville have Chapman-Wilson siding, windows, decks, gazebos or pools. And

Chapman-Wilson is the largest Jacuzzi Premium dealer in North Carolina, Wilson said.

When asked about success, Wilson thought back to his roots in Oxford, Miss. He lived near the University of Mississippi and the home of author William Faulkner. Wilson said Faulkner never failed to stop and say hello.

Wilson's high school football coach, William Calhoun, epitomizes for him the definition of success.

"I learned from him character, dignity, honesty and that when you think you can't go on anymore, you've only just begun," Wilson said.

"He wasn't building football teams, he was building young men's character," he said. "That's success. He's probably the best contractor I'll ever know because the foundations he poured will endure forever."

Wilson sat down recently with staff writer Rebecca Logan to talk more about success in life and business.

Q: Why are some people successful while others struggle?

A: You have to have a cold, white, burning desire to be successful. If you don't have that, go to work for somebody else. I'm always the last one to leave here at night. I'll be here until 7 or 8 at night, and I still work five and a half days a week.

PERSONAL FILE

- **Name:** David Wilson
- **Title:** Co-founder and co-owner of Chapman-Wilson Pools, Spas & Home Improvements Inc.
- **Age:** 57
- **Family:** Wife, Sandi Chapman-Wilson; and teenage children Ashley and Matthew
- **Hometown:** Oxford, Miss.
- **Hobbies:** Spending time with his children and cheering on the Ole Miss football team
- **Last book read:** 'The Firm' by John Grisham
- **Favorite book:** 'Think and Grow Rich' by Napoleon Hill
- **Last movie he went to see:** 'The Aviator'

Q: What is the biggest mistake people make in business?

A: Not having enough money when they open the business and then not being able to sustain it.

Q: What is the biggest obstacle you've faced, and how did you overcome it?

A: Vietnam was the biggest obstacle for me. It was for me a train wreck of emotions. I did two tours over there, (returned with a Purple Heart), and was an infantry medic (with the 5th Battalion of

the 7th Cavalry Regiment of the 1st Cavalry Division). I fought with that for a long time.

You asked me a question, and I'm going to answer it candidly. I chased a lot of answers with alcohol.

For any young person out there today, regardless if your problems are personal or business, there will be a great mentor out there with open arms that will receive you and give you help.

Look for them and their help because — I can assure you, I've done the research — you're not going to find it at the bottom of a glass of beer. That's not the answer.

You find help. Everybody needs help in this life. If you're in this world, you're going to have problems, because life's not fair. That's the long and short of it.

Q: What advice would you give to somebody starting out in business?

A: Recognize that other than God, your customers are your boss. And you have to offer quality, service, marketing, communication and cost.

Surround yourself with positive people. Find yourself good people that you want to associate with, who are going to push you. And you push them for a common goal.