



LOCAL BUZZ

DEFINING MOMENTS: A CONVERSATION WITH MELVIN KRUGER

Greater Macon Chamber of Commerce CEO Yvonne Williams recently sat down for an intimate conversation with Melvin Kruger, the first recipient of a Lifetime Achievement Award presented by the Greater Macon Chamber of Commerce. Kruger shared honest insights and thoughtful reflections about his experiences as an engaged leader at L.E. Schwartz & Son Inc., the five-generation family business that has flourished across America and at home in Macon for over a century. The 2021 Chamber Awards will be presented Dec. 2 at the historic Terminal Station during the Toast of Macon. For more information, visit maconchamber.com. Read on to learn more about Kruger and his legacy.

MELVIN KRUGER adored his grandfather, Louis Ervin Schwartz. In 1910, the immigrant Hungarian metal worker started a company in Macon that today is one of the largest and most respected commercial and industrial roofing and sheet metal contractors in the country.

"The things my grandfather stood for have been the guiding principles of our business. There is no right way to do the

never practiced law after he joined the family business in 1952. "It is gratifying to watch our people grow. Laborers buy in to our simple philosophy, believing they have opportunities to develop new skills and emerge in supervisory roles.

You just need the willingness to learn, the commitment to show up and the desire to work as a team. I consider our people to be our greatest asset and we treat them like extended family."

Two of Kruger's most memorable milestones occurred when his son, Steve Kruger, joined the family business in the late 1970s and later when his grandson Michael Kruger came on board during the company's centennial ation. All family members learned business from the ground up, gaining a great deal of perspective from spending long hours on the roof.

Kruger watched his business and family grow as a result of the collaboration, sharing that the secret to avoiding conflict is to have empathy,

mutual respect and pride in what they accomplish together.

Even now, the 92-year-old icon still enjoys coming into the office because he gets the chance to watch and engage with vibrant young colleagues.

"When I walk in, I see lots of ghosts, too. Their spirits are still with us," Kruger said. "That's what gets me up every morning. I put my feet on the ground. If they go in the direction I point them, it's going to be a great day. You can't get this day back, so take advantage of every opportunity."

Education is the key to a good life. Kruger has never deviated from his belief that the progress of this community is directly related to education.

"If you can't read, write and compute, you can't succeed. Education has always been my passion. The way to get what you want is to get an education," he said. "The water is there, go drink from the fountain of knowledge; it is not contaminated."

When asked to share a few words of wisdom, Kruger replied, "Well, I don't think we need any more focus groups. The top issues are always the same. Race relations, economic development and education. You can change the order if you want to, but those are the things that we know drive this community."

"If you get down to it, we all want the same things. If people would just talk to each other, we would understand that. We all want to feel safe. We all want our children to be happy and healthy. We all want them to have the opportunity to grow and to prosper. We can learn from the past, but we can't get a better one. We need to be supportive of each other. We live in a world of great opportunity."

Kruger's industry involvement has allowed him to make friends in almost every state and many other countries. Just like his grandfather, Kruger loves Macon. At the risk of embarrassing his own grandson, Kruger still carries on Louis' tradition of announcing his arrival in Macon-Bibb with a proud "toot toot salute" from his car's horn when he drives across the county line to return back home.

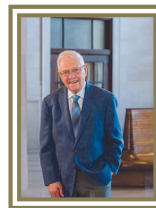
He added, "People are my inspiration every day and I am so fortunate."

— KATHY HOSKINS NOLAN

PHOTO BY JESSICA WHITLEY



2021 Chamber Awards



Melvin Kruger
Lifetime Achievement



Verda Colvin
Citizen of the Year



David Thompson
Citizen of the Year



Mike Austin
Robert F. Hatcher Alumni



Asbury Stenbridge
Chairman's Award



Tiffany Andrews
Workforce Champion



Christele Parham
Young Business Leader



Patty Burns
Ambassador of the Year

The **Greater Macon Chamber** will host an **elegant celebration** to officially toast these **business and community leaders** during the **2021 Chamber Awards** on **Thursday, December 2nd** at the historic **Terminal Station**. We are proud to recognize these forward thinkers who support our advocacy, workforce, leadership and economic development efforts. A curated wine tasting by **Alan Bass** will pair with small plates by **Chef Stuart Hardy** and the culinary team from **Compass Rose Cafe**. Guests will enjoy live jazz from **Jo Bro & Co**. Join us for a festive cheers to the year! Limited tickets are available at maconchamber.com.



As featured in
December/January 2022

