

United Distributors – A Rare Fourth-Generation Family Business

Each year the Georgia Historical Society (GHS) selects iconic companies in our state to be honored through the Georgia Business History Initiative. By showcasing these companies, GHS seeks to teach Georgia students, citizens and tourists alike about the pivotal role of Georgia's leading businesses in the economic, cultural and social development of Georgia and the United States.

“We are pleased to honor United Distributors through the Business History Initiative,” says Robert S. Jepson, Chairman of the Board of Curators at the Georgia Historical Society. “By telling the stories of the companies that built modern-day Georgia, we will instruct and inspire future generations of business and industry leaders across our state.”



Left: Georgia Historical Society President and CEO Dr. Todd Groce with United Distributors President and CEO Doug Hertz; Middle: United Distributors Business History Initiative historical marker; Right: Doug Hertz and family at the recent unveiling of the historical marker

Family-owned businesses are the backbone of the American economy, but few survive past the second generation. United Distributors, the largest beverage alcohol distributor in Georgia, is one of the extremely rare 2-3 percent of family businesses that make it into the fourth generation.

United Distributors has prospered for more than 75 years under Hertz family leadership. Doug Hertz is the third generation of his family to head the company as president and CEO, following in the footsteps of his grandfather Jennings Hertz Sr. and father Jennings Hertz Jr. Doug's son and daughter represent the fourth generation, with Michael serving as a division general manager and Amy Agami serving as executive director of the Hertz Family Foundation.

Jennings Hertz Sr.'s cousin Max Kahn founded the original company in 1940. Kahn was drafted six months later and asked Jennings Sr. to run the company while he was in the service. A second distributorship was added in Florida and another cousin, Edgar Kugelman, joined to run that operation. Over the years, the company grew, adding distributorships and offices. In 1982, the founding families divided ownership and the Hertz and Kugelman family retained United Distributors. In 1992, the Hertz family bought out the Kugelman family's interests.

Doug Hertz joined the company in 1978 after receiving his undergraduate and MBA degrees from Tulane and working with KPMG in New Orleans in accounting and consulting services. He became president in 1984, spearheading an aggressive period of growth, making numerous acquisitions and greatly expanding the company's wine and beer brands. The company grew from 48 employees to some 1,300 today

and headquarters was moved to a 30-acre site in Smyrna. The company has also expanded into Alabama and is the largest beverage alcohol distributor in that state as well as Georgia.

How does a family business make it to the fourth generation? Doug Hertz credits “family values that have been passed down from generation to generation.”

“Those values haven't changed much,” he says. “There's the expectation you work hard, earn the respect of your associates and customers and be prepared to handle responsibility.”

Hertz praises “our employees as a big factor” for the company's success. “I'm proud we have so many people who have been with us for a long time, some 25 to 30 for at least 25 years,” he says.

As the Hertz family has built an enviable reputation in Georgia's business community, it has also become known for its philanthropic initiatives. Jennings Jr. and his wife Jill were especially active in the Atlanta arts community and Doug carries on that tradition as the current chair of the board of the Woodruff Arts Center.

Doug has been a supporter of numerous community projects and is perhaps best known as the founder and board chairman of Camp Twin Lakes, a network of Georgia camp facilities for children with serious illnesses, disabilities and other challenges. Since 1993, Camp Twin Lakes has served more than 100,000 campers.

“Giving back to the community is another family value that has been passed down,” Doug says. “We were taught it was our responsibility to give back and my work in this area has meant a lot to me.”

