

Air Force Print News Today

Air Force news from around the world

Six stars keep family 'business' running 200 years strong

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AFSOC Public Affairs

12/28/2007 - HURLBURT FIELD, Fla.
(AFPN) -- Some might say the Wurster brothers are the senior executive officers in the family business.

Even though they oversee more than 39,900 employees between their divisions, you still won't find their organization on Forbes' list of the largest public companies, and they certainly aren't on the magazine's corporate billionaires list.

But you will find their organization ranks high in the Gallup Pole's list of America's most credible public institutions.

That's because to Vice Adm. Charles Wurster, U.S. Coast Guard Pacific Area commander, and Lt. Gen. Donny Wurster, Air Force Special Operations Command commander, the family business is serving their country, and the Wursters have been in business since the Revolutionary War.

"My dad was an Air Force pilot, and I wanted to be a pilot," said General Wurster, who is a command pilot with more than 4,000 hours in the cockpit.

Their father eventually retired from the Air Force as a colonel. However, he has no qualms about being outranked by two sons.

"One of my father's West Point classmates called him and asked 'what's it like having two sons who out rank you?'" said General Wurster. "His answer was, 'Proud.'"

"He's very proud," Admiral Wurster said.

Admiral Wurster, the older of the two brothers, also was inspired by family tradition and the values instilled in him by his mother, father and grandfathers. However, he didn't look toward the Department of Defense.

"The main thing that drew me to the Coast Guard was the humanitarian mission," said Admiral Wurster, who began his Coast Guard career as a deck watch officer aboard the Coast Guard Cutter Steadfast. "The military part was a family tradition."

The brothers have never been stationed near each other despite serving concurrently.

"I was leaving Hawaii as he arrived there," General Wurster said. "We missed each other by about three months."



Lt. Gen. Donny Wurster (left), Air Force Special Operations Command commander, and Vice Adm. Charles Wurster (right), U.S. Coast Guard Pacific Area commander, are the most recent members of the Wurster family to embark in the family business. The family has a record of military service dating back to the Revolutionary War. As three-star flag officers, they also hold the highest rank of anyone in their family. (U.S. Air Force photo/Senior Master Sgt. Tom Wood)

"That's the closest we've come to being stationed together," Admiral Wurster said with a laugh.

The busy brothers instead rely on family gatherings with their parents and five other siblings to catch up. But, when they do have the chance to see each other, they don't talk much shop.

"We talk a little bit of business here and there," the admiral said. "But it's mostly family stuff and encouragement to each other along the way."

According to the brothers, it's all about supporting one another. Even in a family with seven siblings, two of whom are flag officers, there's not a hint of sibling rivalry.

"There is none," General Wurster said. "He (Admiral Wurster) is one of my heroes; always has been."

Despite reaching the three-star rank in their respective services, it's not the stars on their shoulders motivating their continued service.

"We have people who are willing to leave the comfort of home and hearth to go out intentionally in harms way to serve the citizens," Admiral Wurster said.

"And that's why we do it," General Wurster said. "It's not about our aspirations, and it's not about our position or our personal egos. There are a bunch of great Americans who we have the privilege to serve with, and we have been fortunate enough to be chosen as leaders."

Together, the brothers have their sights set on leading their organizations in a way that continues to earn the confidence of the family business's number one customers: the American people.

"We're each part of our respective teams," Admiral Wurster said. "We may have a role as a leader, but it's the team as a whole that gets the respect of a nation."

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