



Camellia Trophy & Specialties employs five people at its location on the I-65 Service Road. From left are John Nonnenmacher, Jerry Blan, Susan Nonnenmacher, Daniel Brabham and Bill Everett.

Making Memories Since 1958

Although he died in 1985, Tom Nonnenmacher's spirit lives on at the business he started in 1958. His son, **John**, now runs Camellia Trophy & Specialties, along with John's wife, **Susan**. Bill Everett, who started working for "Mr. Tom" when he was just a teenager and is considered part of the family, actually purchased the business in 1986 and ran it until he sold it to John in 2008. And even though he doesn't own it anymore, he still comes to work every day and enjoys telling "war stories" about the old days with the company's founder.

"Mr. Tom" was a larger-than-life character both in personality and in size, at 6-foot-4 and more than 300 pounds. He opened Camellia Bowling Lanes at the corner of Airport Boulevard and McGregor Avenue, where Pinebrook Shopping Center now stands, in 1957. In addition to the four other bowling alleys around town, he opened Camellia Trophy Shop next door as a side business, providing trophies for bowling leagues.

"People tell me all the time, 'I worked for your Dad,'" John says. "I could probably find 300 people who worked for him."

John recalls working in the warehouse behind the shop, building trophies for a nickel apiece, flocking bowling shirts and dipping pins. But eventually, he went to college and went into business for himself as an owner of Hillcrest Optical. Meanwhile, Camellia Trophy Shop was sold to Bill Everett.

"Bill took it to another level," John says. "He added specialties and promotional items, and the business took off." In 2008, when Everett approached him about buying back his father's business, John jumped at the opportunity.

Located off the I-65 Service Road near Cottage Hill Road since 1982, Camellia Trophy & Specialties has a showroom that offers samples of hundreds of styles of trophies for every team sport imaginable and commemorative plaques for any occasion.

The trophy business has changed tremendously since the company started. Thirty years ago, plaques were hand-engraved and took about an hour apiece, but now they're done with a computer, at a rate of 40 or 50 per day. "Three or four of us can do the work it used to take 10 people to do," John says.

Earlier this year, Camellia Trophy & Specialties started a website, and though they take orders from all over the country, most of their customers are Mobile and Baldwin County schools and businesses. And John, like his father before him, prefers having personal contact with his customers. "I still like to talk to people and make sure they get what they want," he says.

"I'm old-school," he adds. "If I can make a customer at 12 years old, I want them to be a customer when my son [10-year-old Justin] takes it over."

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