

**WILLIAMS WHOLESALE SUPPLY**  
**CELEBRATING 70 YEARS OF SUCCESS**

By Buddy Pearson, Herald-Citizen Staff  
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<http://www.ajlambert.com>

**COOKEVILLE** – If there was ever a model for a successful family business, Williams Wholesale Supply would have to be it. A family-owned and operated establishment, Williams Wholesale has been tended to by four generations of Williamses the past 70 years.

“I think it speaks a lot about what we are about in our hearts and about this community, too,” said Bobby Williams. “You read a lot in the paper about buying locally and people here do buy locally. That’s what keeps us going. We have to do our part, but the community has done its part in supporting us.”



(Pictured: Frank Williams, who started Williams Hardware Company in 1939).

Since April of 1939, the William family has been part of Cookeville’s business community. Frank Williams, who served as the Overton

County Circuit Court Clerk, decided to open up a hardware store on the Cookeville square. He coaxed his son Robert out of college to help him run the business. After starting with around \$4,000 worth of inventory, Williams Wholesale Supply has grown into a three-store entity with multiple warehouses that include thousands of feet of shelves full of hardware, electrical and plumbing supplies, creating nearly 3 million dollars in inventory.



“I am proud to see it last so long,” said Robert, who is now 92 years old. “I have enjoyed the family business.”

(Pictured: Frank and Myrtle Williams are pictured in the hardware store that has since grown into Williams Wholesale Supply).

While the business has grown, so has the Williams family. Bobby and Roy, the sons of Robert and Ethel Williams have always been a part of the family business. Even as youngsters, growing up, the boys were always involved.

“With Bobby and I, working here was a given,” said Roy, who has been working full-time at the store since graduating from Vanderbilt in the spring of 1980. “We never really thought about working anywhere else because we worked here in the summers and grew up here all our lives. We had our tricycle down here and all that. We never thought about working anywhere else.”

Bobby, who graduated from Tennessee Tech, worked at the store part-time before taking an official position in 1976, when Williams Wholesale opened up an eye popping lighting showroom. He and Roy worked side by side with their dad until Robert handed over the



reins to his two sons.

(Pictured: Williams Wholesale Supply celebrated its 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary in April. The locally-owned business has been a fixture in Cookeville and in the William family, above, which includes (from left) B-Bob, Roy, Robert, Lee and Bobby).

“Roy and I felt like we were pretty much handling things by the early ‘90s and we were glad to do it. It was time,” Bobby explained. “Dad isn’t one of those people who wanted to go to a retirement home in Florida.



He wanted to come down here for three or four hours and hang out and he did and that’s fine.”

(Pictured: Grover King (right) was one of the first people hired by Frank Williams (left) when he founded Williams Hardware Company).

B-Bob, the son of Bobby and Deborah Williams, became the fourth generation of Williamses to work at the store. After graduating from TTU, B-Bob found him a spot working right next to his dad in 2002.

“We share a office space and some of the things that come across my desk I look at him and ask, ‘Are you ready to come over here?’ When he gets a little more maturity, I might lessen my role here and increase his role,” said Bobby. “If I didn’t have him, I’d have to have two to replace him.”

B-Bob, now 30, worked for a year at the store in Nashville. Now he finds himself immersed in the family business just like his father, uncle and grandpa did.

“I have people threatening to tell stories about me now,” joked B-Bob. “But I do hear a lot of stories about them. It’s been good for them so I know it will be good for me.”

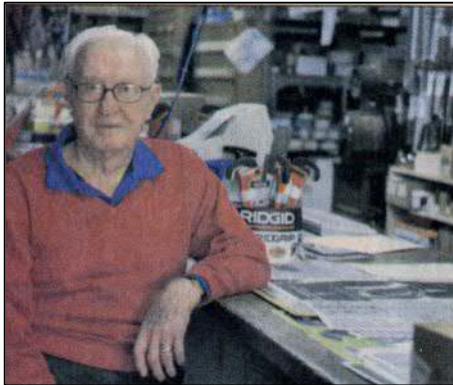


Lee, who graduated from University of Tennessee, is the latest Williams to join the business. The son of Roy and Diane, the 24-year-old wasn’t planning on following in his father’s footsteps.

(Pictured: Robert and Ethel Williams have helped keep Williams Wholesale going for 70 years).

“I didn’t plan on being here,” Lee admitted. “One day it hit me and I had a talk with the parents and decided I was going to work here. They were happy I wanted to come work with the family.”

“Working with the family can be tough at times but I’m fortunate I have a good family to work for,” continued Lee. “We all get along very well. It’s been good so far.”



Nobody was more surprised or happier to see Lee change his mind that Roy was.

(Pictured: Robert Williams helped start Williams Wholesale in 1939 with his father Frank Williams).

“It was a shock but he said he loved working with the people and that was what was in his heart. When he told me that, I said that was great and to come on. We changed his major to business,” Roy recalled.



“It’s not that I didn’t want to steer him away from that, but it’s tough to work with family some times. I wanted him to pursue what he wanted to pursue.”

(Pictured: B-Bob Williams (standing) joined his dad Bobby (sitting) at Williams Wholesale Supply to continue the legacy started by Frank Williams in 1939).

Working with brothers and sons and fathers isn’t always what it is cracked up to be. Just like any business, there can be hard times and conflict.

“Your business becomes too much of your life,” said Bobby.

“It’s hard to leave at 5 o’clock and come home and forget it – not just from a physical but from a mental standpoint. It really is a dominant feature in your life that has pluses and minuses. I’ve never know it any other way.



One of the main sources of the Williamses success has come from customer service. And that’s what Bobby says keeps people coming back.

(Pictured: Lee Williams (right) is the newest member of the Williams family to join the business. He is the oldest son of Roy Williams (left), who has been working at the store since 1980).

“I’m proud to be a service for this community. Do we make money? Yes. But at the end of the day to have someone say they got something from me 20 years ago and it’s still working, that’s pretty cool, especially when people can go over the Internet and get what they want. I like business the old way.”

The same sort of family-style service found in Cookeville can also be found in Nashville and Columbia. Williams Wholesale Supply opened up a store in Nashville in May of 2005 and will be having a grand opening for the Columbia store on May 20.

“Everybody wanted to know why we wanted to go to Nashville. The timing was good. It was good time for another independent to come to Nashville. It wasn’t that hard to attract good people. It’s gone really well,” explained Roy. “It’s all about people. Just because I’m Williams Wholesale, I can’t go to Nashville or open the doors and just say ‘Hey, I’m Williams Wholesale. Here I am.’ People do business with people.

The Williams family tradition could expand in the future. Roy’s son David is attending the University of Tennessee where he is focusing on wildlife science. But Roy says he would be a welcomed addition if he changed his mind. Meanwhile, Lee says he would like to keep the tradition going.

“I would definitely enjoy seeing my kids follow in my footsteps,” said Lee. “It would be great to see them doing this.”

In the meantime, the current crop of Williamses will keep maintaining the level of success that has lasted almost a lifetime.

“To have a family business and still have a family business after 70 years is pretty special,” said Bobby.

“I’m proud to be part of it.”

\*Read more about the History of Putnam Co. TN at: <http://www.ailambert.com>



Pictured: Some of the people employed at Williams Wholesale when the new showroom opened in 1976 included (from left) Gary Loftis, David Wilkerson, Doug Stewart, Doug Austin, Sue Dobbs, Gary Roberts, Dillard Massa, Linda Dillon, Robert Lee Huddleston, David Rippetoe and Harold Walker.

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**Robert Lee Huddleston Obt.**

b. 20 September 1921, Putnam Co., TN – d. 16 October 2017, Cookeville, Putnam Co., TN, Cookeville, Putnam Co., TN, md **Dorothy Minnie Lou (Hitchcock) Huddleston**, b. 4 April 1925, TN – d. 19 August 1968, Cookeville, Putnam Co., TN, d/o **Frank Len Hitchcock** (1901-1954) & **Helen Avannah Polston** (1903-1991), both buried in Nash Cemetery, Sparta, White Co., TN. Robert Lee Huddleston, s/o **Andrew Dow Huddleston** (1885-1982) & **Elizabeth Ann Baker** (1888-1961), both buried in Stone Seminary Cemetery, Cookeville, Putnam Co., TN.

Services for Robert Lee Huddleston, 96 of Cookeville, Tennessee, will be held Friday, October 20, at the Cookeville chapel of Hooper-Huddleston & Horner Funeral Home.



Interment will follow in Nash Cemetery in White County. Rev. Gary Farris will officiate.

He passed from life Monday, October 16, 2017 in Cookeville, Tennessee.

He was born on September 20, 1921 in Putnam County, Tennessee, to the late Andrew 'Dow' Huddleston and Elizabeth Ann Baker Huddleston.

**Mr. Huddleston was an employee of the Williams Wholesale Supply in Cookeville**

for over 35 years.

**Robert's father Dow Huddleston, founded the Mt. Herman Cumberland Presbyterian Church. Robert became a member of the church in 1936 and served as an elder from 1944 until the closing of the church.** Robert had a deep faith in the Lord. He was a longtime Gideon and also served as trustee of Nash Cemetery.

He was preceded in death by his brothers, Arnold Huddleston, John H. Huddleston and J.T. Huddleston; his sisters, Jena Lee Howard, Eve Nichols, Dimple Howard and Rowena Garrison; and his grandchildren, Ivan Howard, O.D. Howard and Coreen Danner.

He is survived by daughters, Wanda Boatman of Birmingham, Alabama and Judy Alexander of Hermitage, Tennessee; his grandchildren, Sean Alexander, Tiffanie Boatman and Stephanie Boatman; greatgrandchildren, Isabella Fleming, Alexandra Fleming, Taylor Davis, Christian Lee Davis, Jeremy Boone and Jacob "Boomer" Murchison; sister, Doreen Carr; and by his adoring nieces and nephews.

Family and friends will serve as pallbearers.