

Family Crisis Leads To Career

With his father lying in a hospital bed, Larry Brandt played a key role in keeping the family electrical business running. *By Lynn Hamilton*

Things are going well for Larry Brandt these days. The 1987 national Agricultural Electrification proficiency award winner is working at his family's electric business, Brandt Bros. Inc., and is doing what he enjoys most—working with wires.

However, the current of his life has not always flown so smoothly.

In April of 1985, his father Richard Brandt, a partner and founder of the business, was working on an asphalt plant about 80 miles from the family's Archbold, Ohio, home. It was a windy day and a gust caught him. Mr. Brandt lost his balance and fell. The accident left Mr. Brandt with a broken neck and Larry with a lot of responsibility.

"At the time, there was only my uncle and one other guy working, so I took time off school and I spent a lot of my summer working overtime," Larry, 19, says. He would make several more sacrifices in the coming year to help out with the business.

"Larry was on the prom committee that year. He skipped the prom the night of the accident to come down to the hospital," says Mr. Brandt. Later that summer, Larry also gave up his chance to attend Buckeye Boys State, a select summer government camp in Ohio, to make sure the work got done.

"I had to give a little, but yet I still enjoyed my summer," he says. Larry's attitude assured his father that the business was in good hands.

"He just seemed to grow up, he became a young man overnight," says Mr. Brandt. "When other kids would want to go running around, Larry would always check first to see if there were any more milk machines that had to be fixed or anything else that had to be done." Mr. Brandt is almost fully recovered now, though some arthritis still bothers him.

The transition from father's helper to responsible electrician was sudden, but Larry had an extensive background in skill development that enabled him to

deal with his new role in the business.

"As long as I've been around, the business has been here. I grew up with it," Larry says. His father and uncle Carl started the company about 30 years ago. Mr. Brandt remembers, "From a very young age, I've always taken Larry along. We used to call him the 'gopher boy'—he'd go to the truck to pick up tools."

As he got older, Larry was encouraged by friends to join the FFA chapter at his home high school, Archbold. The early electrical training had captured Larry's interest for good. "When they told me I needed an SOEP, I decided to take my work as one of my projects. I just kept building on that project," Larry says.

Even with his part-time responsibilities with the business, Larry found time to become actively involved in his chap-

me. When I was stuck on a problem, they didn't tell me the answer right away. They let me work it out so I would learn to do it right.

Some of his most difficult electrical experiences have been on unfamiliar equipment.

"We had a gravel dredge to work on, and in our location, there aren't many places for a dredge," Larry says. "We didn't really know that much about it, but we had to go in and rewire the whole dredge. We were picking up knowledge as we went along."

Brandt Bros. Inc., covers seven counties in northwestern Ohio and two counties in southeast Michigan. Ten grain elevators and nine asphalt plants are also under contract with the company, so it gives Larry and his family plenty to do. The Brandts are also Surge dairy equipment dealers, so many dairy operations also call on the company's services.

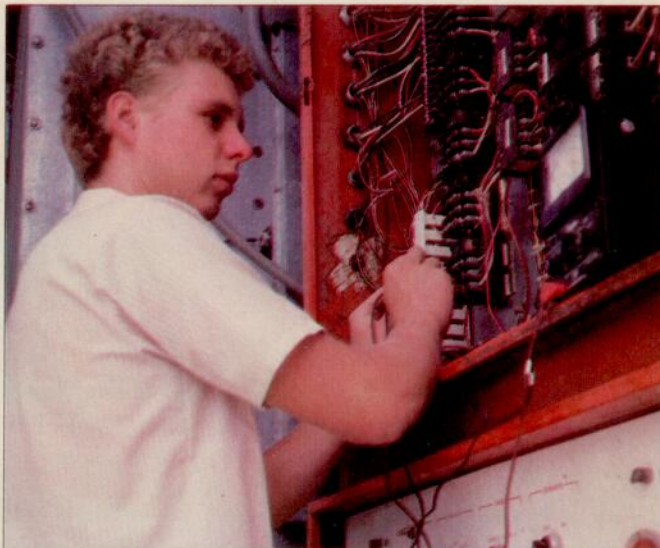
These days, a 45-hour work week is typical for Larry. "I have put in as high as 60," he says. "It depends a lot on the weather, because we do a lot of work with bulk tanks. When the weather gets bad, we might be out until midnight fixing tanks."

Hooking up the dairy systems also takes a lot of computer work. Mr. Brandt says, "Larry has taken that over completely. I understand them to a point, but he's more advanced in that, he knows how to program and wire them up."

But Larry would rather be outdoors than working in milk parlors or on house wiring. "I

like to work a lot around the elevators, commercial work," he says. "It's more challenging. At the elevators, there are a lot of people around and when you're in a community like ours where everyone knows everyone else, people can see what you're doing. If you do that well, they may call you."

The work environment and the constant change of pace are what Larry likes best about his work. "You get into a different situation almost every day, it's



The Brandts fix from 100 to 200 grain dryers each year.

ter. He served as president his senior year and participated on the parliamentary procedure team all four years. He rounded out his activities with soil judging in the fall and animal judging in the spring.

While he developed his leadership abilities through the FFA, he was developing valuable occupational skills as he began to learn the challenges of electrical work.

"My father and my uncle encouraged