



It's a family affair...

# Wapsi Fly

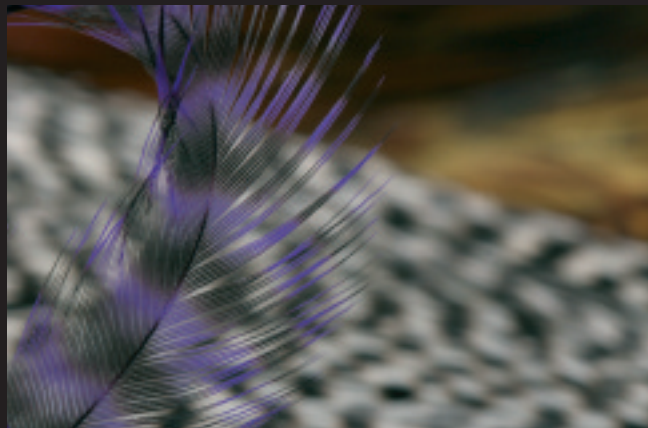
Our family affair series heads west to 'the land of the free' to speak with the Schumuecker family – the lifeblood of fly-tying-material expert the Wapsi Fly Company. The family employee roll has fluctuated over the years but the aims have always been the same...

**F**ounded in 1945 by Lacey Gee, the Wapsi Fly Company started life as a general processing facility used by American farmers at the time.

Soon afterwards, Lacey started a bulk feather business that he spun off as Wapsi Fly after the original company went out of business. The name Wapsi is short for Wapsipinicon, an American Indian name for a local river, in Iowa, where the current owner of the company grew up.

The company, which specialises in producing high-quality fly-tying materials of all types, was purchased in 1973 by Tom Schumuecker, who saw an opportunity to pursue his passion as a full-time job. Since then, it has been in the caring and dedicated hands of the Schumuecker family and now involves Tom's three sons – Eric, Joe and Karl.

With varying business backgrounds covering everything from electrical engineering through to fly tying in a Costa Rican factory, the three brothers and their father have turned Wapsi into a successful business that prides itself on high-quality products and a level of service you can only really get from a tight-knit



family company.

"There are some challenges to running a family business," says quality control manager Eric.

"We have ups and downs. But the secret of our success has been to resolve personal matters outside the office."

"Agreed!" interjects Joe, Wapsi's production manager.

"A family run business is a lot like a marriage: you have to learn how to work things out and move forward afterwards."

Karl, the company's general manager, adds that each member of the Schumuecker family has found his or her own territory within the business and has learnt to respect it.

Father of the three and company owner Tom clarifies: "Everyone has plenty to do. There are many opportunities

and hundreds of spin-offs from the core business."

Of course, the benefits of a family business are probably the reasons why so many in this trade set them up.

"Our family sticks together in both good times and hard times," Eric says.


"All of our employees who have been with us for some time have become like members of our family. For example, following a huge fire we had in 1987, some employees refused their pay cheques to ease the financial burden.

"Likewise, the fly fishing industry itself is like a big family – following the fire our vendors continued to send us products and refused to cash cheques until we were up and on our feet again.

To us, family and business are interchangeable parts of everyday life."

Business decisions also benefit from the close relationship that Tom, his sons and his staff share. All being on the same page is something that helps Wapsi overcome disagreements and focus on the things they do well to improve the business overall.

And it would appear that fly tying is very much in the blood of the next generation of Schumueckers, much as it has been with Eric, Joe and Karl.

Joe comments: "The next generation has been showing great interest in the family business. I would love it if our children were to run the business one day but it is ultimately their choice. I am just hopeful that, when that day comes, whoever is running the company really cares about the business in the same way that we do." 



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## Meet the family...

### Tom Schumuecker

*Owner*



Tom's passion for fly tying started when he was just a small boy growing up in Iowa. His passion in the field was realised to its full potential when the opportunity arose for him to buy Wapsi back in the 1970s.

Tom, with the help of his family, has built Wapsi up into one of America's and the world's top fly-tying companies.

### Karl Schumuecker

*General manager*



Karl began his work with Wapsi at the age of just 13, when he used to help pick and pack orders. Karl has a degree in electrical engineering from the University of Arkansas and has been general manager since 1995. He is heavily involved in the day-to-day

running of the business and building up the infrastructure to handle packing, labelling and shipping more than 100,000 units of product per week.

### Joe Schumuecker

*Production manager*



Joe's role within the company involves overseeing all of the dying and processing of the natural and synthetic fly-tying materials that Wapsi produces.

Joe's niche is in Wapsi Fly's one-of-a-kind dye room. He oversees hundreds of products that must be washed, dyed and dried in dozens of colours. His mechanical skills are regularly used in keeping the equipment running.

### Eric Schumuecker

*Quality control manager*



First introduced to the world of fly tying at the tender age of seven, Eric has made fly tying his passion.

Eric's early expertise in fly tying and material processing soon led to a position training production fly tyers at a factory in Costa Rica. He then returned to the

US and to his family at Wapsi.

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right choice