

LARGE BUSINESS
BURTON + BURTON
 BOGART

CHANGING AN INDUSTRY

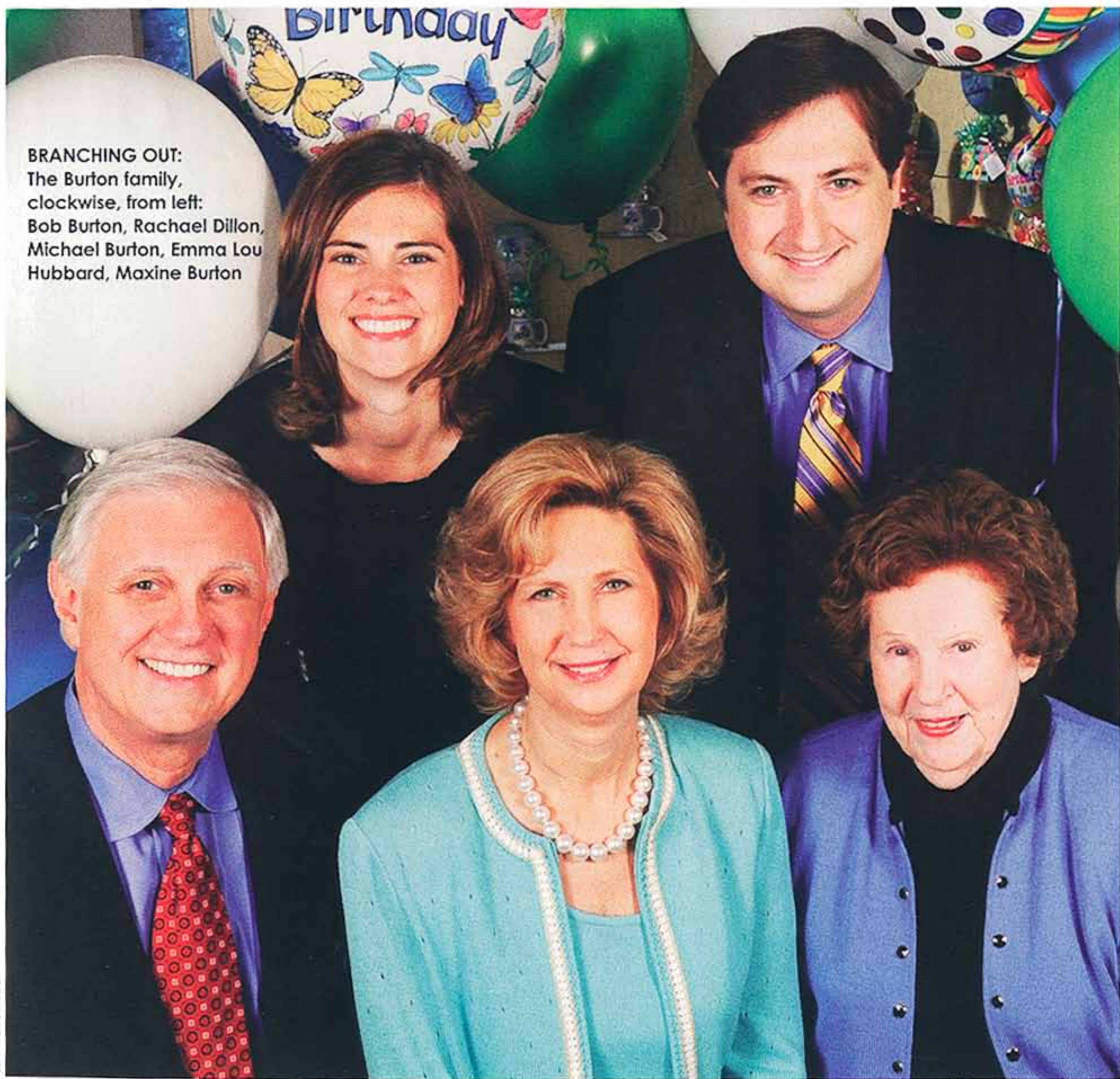
BY PATTY RASMUSSEN

ITS WEBSITE BIDS VISITORS, “welcome to our family,” and the same atmosphere pervades burton + Burton’s corporate headquarters, warehouses and main showroom. Smiling employees and warm greetings are the

rule, not the exception, at this 26-year-old family-owned business, the largest supplier of balloons and coordinating gift products in the United States.

“I’ve always thought our biggest asset was our people,” says Michael Burton, son of founder, president, and chief operating officer Maxine Burton, and her husband, Bob, who serves as the company’s chief executive officer. Michael, who works in sales, believes the 364 employees who work for the company – many of whom have been there for 20-plus years – “make” the company. “They take our customer service to the next level,” he says.

Customer service is a burton + Burton’s hallmark. In January 2006, the company transitioned from its original name, Flowers, Inc. Balloons, to burton + Burton, a unique styling using lower and upper case ‘Bs’ to signify the company’s past and future.



BRANCHING OUT:
 The Burton family,
 clockwise, from left:
 Bob Burton, Rachael Dillon,
 Michael Burton, Emma Lou
 Hubbard, Maxine Burton

JENNIFER STACUP

With customers worldwide, burton + Burton offers more than 15,000 products, many developed and designed by its creative team in Bogart. The company services gift shops, boutiques, hospital gift shops, pharmacies and floral shops via catalogs and website. In addition to the Bogart showroom, there are showrooms in the Atlanta, Dallas and Chicago merchandise marts. It's an amazing operation and a story of how one determined woman with an idea helped change an industry.

Bob Burton was a partner in Flowers, Inc., a retail/wholesale florist in Athens, in 1982 when he told Maxine of an article he'd read about balloon bouquets delivered by clowns. "At that time, balloon shops were cropping up on every corner," Maxine says.

She played around with the idea of balloons as a greeting card, even creating her own balloon bouquet packaged in a large wedding bouquet box. "My children loved opening it, seeing the balloons float out," she says.

Maxine sensed that balloons had a transcendent and inexpensive appeal. She understood the floral market and believed balloons could enhance an arrangement. "It was a win-win," she says. "Customers liked balloons because it was fun, new and different; store owners liked it because customers did and it was an inexpensive add-on." Maxine convinced many of their customers that adding balloons would expand their business, adding a twist to what they'd always done; thus, Flowers Inc., Balloons was born.

Maxine says being able to spot trends and being willing to diversify their product line [to include home décor items] has aided the company's success. Bob agrees, "It's a constant evolution. It's a type of fashion industry in that much of how something sells is how it's presented."

Both Bob and Maxine are actively involved in spotting and buying items. "It's not an exact science," Bob says, "but after 26 years of experience you get a sixth sense about what sells."

Maxine's parents, Maxie and Emma Lou Hubbard, were instrumental in the company's startup. Though Maxie is now retired, Emma Lou remains actively involved, managing the company's warehouse operations. And the third generation came on board six years ago when Bob and Maxine's now-married

daughter, Rachael Dillon, joined the company.

"We talked about expectations beforehand and saw we were on the same page," says Rachael, who graduated with a degree in education like her mother, teaching for several years before returning to the University of Georgia in 2002 for her master's in business administration. She joined burton + Burton in

Cox Family Enterprise Center

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2008 winners and finalists*

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- J&J Industries, Dalton (Finalist)
- Jim Ellis Automotive Group, Atlanta (Finalist)

Medium Category:

- Pull-A-Part, Atlanta (Winner)
- Traton Homes, Marietta (Finalist)
- Turner Furniture Company (Finalist)

Small Category:

- Parker's Heating & Air Conditioning, Americus (Winner)
- Acree Oil Company, Toccoa (Finalist)
- Stripling's General Store, Cordele (Finalist)

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2003 and through the years has worked in different departments, learning the business. She's currently "shadowing" her mother.

"I'm trying to learn everything that's in her head," Rachael says, "even things she doesn't realize she knows!"

Michael worked for several different companies before joining the family firm in January 2007. Through his past business experience, he knows there's a different atmosphere at burton + Burton. "It's a place where people truly care," he says. "That's rare in a corporate environment."

"It's been a fun run," Bob says. "When I think about starting something, something that started from one person, and seeing it grow ... it's been pretty amazing. Seeing it succeed, it's been the American dream."

MEDIUM-SIZED BUSINESS
PULL-A-PART
ATLANTA

**AN ENVIRONMENTAL
MISSION**

BY PATTI GHEZZI

WHEN A CAR HAS RACKED UP tens of thousands of miles and made its last grocery store run, Pull-A-Part provides a "dignified" last stop before the shredder; a



ENDURING LEGACY:
Pull-A-Part's Ross
Kogon, left, and
Gregg Cohen

JENNIFER STALCUP