Imagine working day-in and day-out with your parents, siblings, aunts, uncles and cousins.

More than a third of college students’ families own a business, including Stetson University junior R.J. Santore. For several years, R.J. and his family have been involved with Stetson’s Family Business Center - where R.J. is a Family Business minor.

The Santores own and operate Santore & Sons, a fireworks manufacturer in Bunnell, Fla. Santore & Sons sells its pyrotechnics worldwide to clients such as Disney, Sea World, professional and collegiate football teams, professional wrestling and concert entertainers such as Van Halen, U2 and Seal.

Although R.J. has only worked for the family business about three years, he’s been interested in the business since he was a kid.

“My father always told me to be whatever I wanted to be, and I know my family would support me no matter what I decided to do,” he said. “Since I was a kid, I wanted to work with the family business but because of federal laws, I wasn’t permitted to until I turned 18. There is a 99.9 percent chance that I will work with Santore after I graduate.”

One of the main objectives of Stetson’s Family Business program is to help family businesses, like Santore & Sons, succeed to the next generation.

“Most CEO’s want to keep their business in the family when they retire, but less than one-third are successful in making the hand-off,” said Greg McCann, director of Stetson’s Family Business Center. “Our program is committed to helping family businesses improve their odds of survival by educating the next generation.”

Although R.J. is pursuing a minor in Family Business, students can also major in Family Business. The first Family Business major in the country, Stetson’s program gives students an understanding of family business dynamics, communication techniques, and strategic, estate and succession planning. There is also an emphasis on how to manage the overlap of family and business and the lifelong relationships students will develop with their family and the business.

For R.J., the communication skills he’s gained in the program have been the most helpful.

“The most significant thing I did was have my family with me during the communication retreat. I think communication is the bridge to success within family business because without it, the business and the family will deteriorate,” he said.

“The Family Business courses really helped me move forward with my family and the family business. I have established credibility with my family and they see my desire to work with them. When the day comes, and if I’m ready, I would like to run Santore & Sons. I’m very proud to be part of the business, and I want to do more. Overall, I want Santore & Sons to continue growing and to be here for generations to come.”

Pictured above: R.J. and his dad, Ralph Santore, look over some inventory at Santore & Sons in Bunnell, Fla.