

Building From Scratch

One of the University of Wyoming's Distinguished Alumni for 1986 gives credit to a UW trustee for encouraging him to fulfill his desire to acquire a college education.

Lloyd I. "Jerry" Evans, a highly successful engineer living in Ponca City, Okla., said the insistence of his dad's close friend, Milward Simpson, to get him enrolled in the University had a major influence in convincing him to follow through with his plans to get a college education.

Simpson, the father of U.S. Senator Alan and gubernatorial candidate Pete, was president of the UW Board of Trustees at the time and drove Evans in the fall of 1946 from their homes in Cody to Laramie, helped him enroll and helped him find a place to live. Milward and Alan are past recipients of the Distinguished Alumni Award, one of the highest awards given by the University and administered through the office of alumni relations.

Before attending the University, Evans graduated from Cody High School (1945) and received training as a U.S. Naval Aviation Cadet at Doane College in Nebraska and Notre Dame before the program was phased out when World War II ended in 1945. He was then transferred to Japan where he served occupation duty for a short time until his release from the Navy in 1946.

Following WW II, college campuses across the country swelled with veterans who had grown up in the Depression of the '30s. These young men and women were determined to take advantage of a college education to provide an opportunity to make a better financial life for themselves and their families.

With the implementation of the GI Bill, it was also an opportunity for married people to get a college education.

Evans said the University was suddenly alive with a festive atmosphere and bursting at the seams with students.

"The University was not prepared to accommodate married couples so barracks and pre-fab buildings were moved to campus while butler huts (little metal buildings) were erected on campus to house an overflow of classes," he said.



Jerry Evans took this small construction company in Ponca City, Oklahoma and built it up, then diversified. He started with 11 employees and is now up to over 400 employees.

Teachers were now confronted with over crowded classes necessitating a high standard of dedication and performance by both the teachers and the students to survive in the university atmosphere, which have now become trademarks of UW.

"One of the things that influenced me and most of my fellow students was the fact that we were children of the Depression," Evans remembers. "The Great Depression was instilled in our minds and higher education was more important than ever in make a living in a more competitive world."

Evans said due to his generation's involvement in both the Depression and WW II, their perspective of economic and war-time reality is somewhat different than the generation that followed in the '60s. He said he believes those different perspectives probably

lead to the "generation gap" that followed in the '60s when college became a place to "do your own thing" rather than get an education.

Evans fondly remembers his parents who constantly fought adverse conditions of the Depression to provide him with the staples of life and a loving home along with an encouragement to work hard to accomplish his goals.

He said not everyone had the chance to go to college when he was in school so the ones that did, took advantage of the financial opportunities that a college education could provide.

"We were in college as goal oriented individuals," he said, "and believed that college would provide the opportunity for a better job and a better way of life. I chose engineering because that was where the job opportunities were more prevalent at the time."

Evans learned many valuable lessons while attending college, but gives considerable credit to a summer job selling Yellowstone National Park photo guides at the Buffalo Bill Dam with the personal development of his excellent selling and communication skills.

"We worked on a commission basis which helped to provide income for expenses and the then 'luxury' of a car... but, the most valuable lesson was learning about people," he said.

Evans and his co-workers would talk to several hundred people a day. They quickly developed a system of looking up the counties of cars from different states to determine whether the people in the car would be a good prospect.

"The lesson we learned was that if the car was from a big city and the people were big city oriented, it was usually a waste of time to try to sell them pictures," he explains.

"In general, rural people, or people from smaller towns, were friendlier by nature.

"I also learned that it's a lot easier to sell to people in the morning. I would have two-thirds of my daily commission by noon. Late in the afternoon, as the day got hotter, the people were tired and not receptive to buying.

"I use that as a criterion in my own business," he said. "If I'm trying to consummate a business arrangement or trying to make a sale, it's my policy to contact in the morning."

While at the University, Evans did well in math and science and decided to major in electrical engineering. He joined the Alpha Tau Omega social fraternity and Phi Epsilon Phi, an honors fraternity for men.

After graduating in 1950 with what he classifies as "mediocre grades," Evans worked as a logging service engineer with the Halliburton Company. Halliburton required Evans to transfer from his native Wyoming to Guymon, Oklahoma.

While working in Guymon, Evans met a highway contractor who hired him away from

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Lloyd I. "Jerry" Evans, Recipient 1986 UW Distinguished Alumni Award

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Halliburton, moved him to Oklahoma City and made him vice president of Tri-State Construction Company.

Making the transformation from the electrical engineering with Halliburton to the civil engineering with Tri-State Construction, provided Evans with numerous opportunities to travel throughout the state of Oklahoma, developing business skills he would find beneficial in years to come.

In 1960, Evans bought a small asphalt company in Ponca City. When he bought the company it consisted of one asphalt plant, 12 pieces of road construction equipment and employed 11 people. He has since developed a network of support systems wherein each company contributes within the corporate entity which has now evolved to include 22 subsidiaries employing over 400 people throughout the state of Oklahoma.

Evans attributes his success in his business operations to a combination of a devoted and supportive wife, a loving family, an excellent education at UW, learning experiences in his previous business life, a strong corporate family and "just plain hard work."

With the limited manpower and capabilities of the tiny construction firm when he first bought the company, Evans would do the administrative duties by day and he would haul sand and rock needed for the next day to the location site in the evening after office hours.

His enthusiasm and dedication is from a firm belief that a person should love his or her work because "you spend more time at work than at anything else.

"A wise man once told me that if you don't find joy in your work, you're unlikely to find it all," he said.

By setting the example of hard work, Evans was fortunate to find employees who became equally enthusiastic and eager to see the company expand. With hard work and some "good luck" the company prospered and began to expand its operations.

"We wanted a broader base than just Ponca City so our first move was to Stillwater," he

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said. "It was a university town that had federal funding for the campus ... that was a good move on our part and gave us a broader market."

Next, his company bought an existing concrete plant in Enid which was the beginning of their concrete operations which later spread to Lawton and Altus, with a division in Ponca City to compliment their established asphalt operations.

"The company wanted to diversify geographically in the existing business while making the necessary vertical and horizontal moves to enable us to become involved in other types of business," Evans said from his Ponca City home overlooking a large acreage that closer resembles a city park, complete with a swimming pool, jogging trails, picnic grounds and fishing ponds.

The diversification came in the form of a pipeline construction company; a consulting business using retirees from major companies to contract out on a short or long term basis; the purchase of banks and financial institutions; an oil company primarily involved in operating existing oil wells; a fly ash disposal which disposes of fly ash from coal generation plants; and farming and cattle operations.

"The company became involved in the cattle business due to operating several sand quarries and aggregate quarries," he explains. "As we acquired property, primarily agricultural land, cattle were purchased to graze. We also raise wheat on the land until such time as we need to market the rock. This is an example of the ideas generated for

diversification as a basis for growth."

With the Oklahoma economy bottoming out as a result of the collapse in the oil industry and continued problems in the farming industry, Evans' decision to diversify now seems to be a smart one as some of his business operations have not been affected by the present economy.

In addition to his business operations, Evans is active in civic and professional organizations. Highlights of Evans' achievements include:

* Being presented a 25-year Service Award to the State of Oklahoma by Governor George Nigh for Evans & Associates' contributions to the State of Oklahoma.

* Named president of the Ponca City Chamber of Commerce in 1977.

* Was appointed as a member of the board of directors of the Oklahoma General Contractors Association, the Oklahoma Asphalt Pavement Association and the National Asphalt Pavement Association.

* Named "Boss of the Year" by the Ponca City Chamber of Commerce.

* Was elected to the board of directors of Security Bank & Trust Company, Frontier Federal Savings & Loan, The Bank of Western Oklahoma and Foreman Cement Company, a division of Arkansas-Louisiana Gas Company.

* Is a past member of International Young Presidents' Organization (YPO) and is a current member of the YPO 49ers Club.

* Evans & Associates was named the outstanding local industry by the Ponca City

Chamber of Commerce in 1972.

* Evans & Associates was awarded the 1977 Quality Paving Award by the National Asphalt Pavement Association for the finest Urban Section of Paving in the United States. The company also received the award from the state organization.

He is active in the Episcopal Church and has served on the Vestry and as Senior Warden. He said he believes attending church each Sunday inspires him to survive his always hectic work week.

Jerry Evans is also a lifetime member of the UW Alumni Association, a member of the UW Alumni Scholarship Club and is a Top Hand donor to the Cowboy Joe Club. He belongs to numerous other clubs and organizations on a local, state and national basis.

Although he calls himself an avid "Okie" by residency of 36 years, Evans returns to his home state of Wyoming several times a year and remains as active as possible in projects involving the University and his hometown of Cody.

As Evans sat quietly in his home on a hot July day contemplating the value of his college education, his reflections were those of pride, accomplishment and gratitude for the opportunities presented through his college degree.

"The important thing is for people to complete their education and learn all that is available to you; not only in your major field of study, but learn how to express yourself and communicate your thoughts and ideas," he advises.

"All the wonderful knowledge in the world is valueless if you are unable to communicate your thoughts to others. My advice to young engineers would be to learn how to express yourself by taking different courses such as journalism and English and apply that knowledge to your chosen field.

"A college education is valuable in many respects, not only for the concentrated knowledge in your chosen field, but college teaches you how to study, how to learn, how to think, how to organize your time and gives you an awareness that will enable you to apply yourself to any task or opportunity that life has to offer."