

'Funny guy' Heywood reflects on construction career

By DEBRA BAKER BECK, ALUMNEWS EDITOR

The road to a civil engineering degree was long for distinguished alumnus John Heywood (BS '51), one that led to a prosperous construction career in California.

The first time he enrolled at UW, in 1940, Heywood hitchhiked from Greybull with a friend, a 98-cent suitcase (with "Wyoming" written on the side) and \$50 in his pocket.

He lasted only one quarter before dreams of a warmer climate called. Heywood took a freight train to California and found a job pumping gas for Standard Oil. The company sent him to school to learn the fine art of pumping—and getting the most out of a sale.

He worked for a time in the defense industry then entered the U.S. Navy in 1944. When he was discharged in 1946, Heywood again packed his bags for Laramie, this time benefitting from the GI Bill, which he called a "great boon" for returning soldiers.

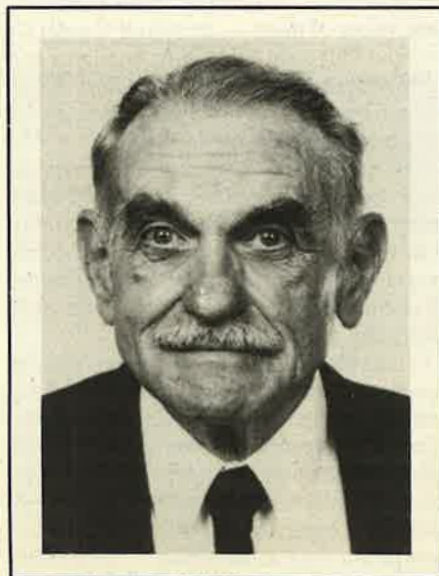
Getting his degree was a difficult process. Though he didn't know it at the time (and wouldn't find out until age 70), Heywood is dyslexic. He took freshman English seven times before a teacher named Annie Winslow passed him. Heywood also recalls one engineering assignment when he spelled the word "area" four different ways without realizing it. He finally graduated in 1951 when, needing only an engineering economics class, A.J. McGaw, then dean of engineering, gave him a set of problems to solve and called it good.

"I have never been a great intellect," Heywood says of his school career, but "I had a lot of fun."

He categorizes himself as "a little different. I was a real character. There's no doubt about that."

In fact, there's proof to that claim: in the 1947 *Wyo* yearbook, amidst the pages of beauty queens is "John Heywood—King of Campus Characters."

When he finally received his degree, Heywood again headed to California to start



John Heywood

his construction career with Robert E. McKee. Heywood worked there before joining M.J. Brock and Sons for the first time. He worked there until 1957, when he was named president of Stillwell Construction, a small California builder. He stayed with Stillwell until it was liquidated in 1960, when he rejoined Brock.

Heywood stayed at Brock 17 years before making his first attempt at retirement. During this time, he developed two personal real estate projects, a small apartment building and a condominium complex. He purchased land for the latter; but when the value of the home already constructed there skyrocketed, he decided to leave the house and build five condo units around it. Heywood still lives in the original house and serves as president of "Heywood Manor."

Finding himself ill-suited for retirement, Heywood returned to the construction business in 1981 as a senior project manager for C.W. Driver Contractors of Los Angeles.

He stayed there seven more years before

trying retirement again. This time, Heywood branched off into a new arena—arbitration. He became involved in the American Arbitration Association, where he used his extensive background in construction to work on cases regarding litigation in that field.

Heywood notes that he never actually took advantage of the engineering degree he worked so hard to obtain.

"I often tell people I have a degree in civil engineering—brand new, never been used," he says with a hearty laugh.

An Exciting Time in Construction

While he didn't delve deep into the field for which he was trained, Heywood managed to create a solid career in the construction industry and witnessed a period of incredible expansion in California.

"It was really phenomenal—never saw anything like it in my life," Heywood says of the building activity during that period. He recalls working on one 100,000-sq. ft. building at the Irvine Industrial Park, which was one of only two projects in the development. When he returned only year later to build another structure, Heywood saw hundreds of buildings where empty space once dominated.

"Diverse" is a good description of the scope of the jobs Heywood took on. For example, he worked on phase I of Park Newport, which included 1,500 units on a bluff overlooking Newport, Calif.; the Glendale Galleria, a major shopping center; the Beckman Auditorium at Cal Tech; Beckman Instruments Co.'s corporate offices; and even the Six Flags Magic Mountain theme park.

"I've done a lot of building and enjoyed every minute of it," he says.

Heywood's conversation is peppered with jokes and one-liners. It's probably only natural that he eventually embarked on another career—stand-up comedian. Heywood attended two

comedy schools in recent years to sharpen his skills and he has managed to play some of the best venues in the area.

"There are some great clubs in Los Angeles, and I've played most of them," Heywood says. "But I've never got a penny. I swore if I ever got paid, I'd quit; and nobody has tried to destroy my reputation."

Being funny is hard work.

"It brings you back to reality, because it's not as easy as you think," according to Heywood. "I have a routine that runs 3 minutes, 9 minutes and 15 minutes. It's all the same stuff, only one's slower than the other."

What does he draw from for his material?

"The fact that I'm an old man."

Serving His Alma Mater

John Heywood is one of UW's most ardent supporters in southern California. When a friend asked whether UW could use a few students from the area, Heywood said he'd "look into it." He ended up organizing a recruitment effort that made personal contact with hundreds of California students.

"I found that people my age really wanted to recruit," he says. And that's exactly what they did. Heywood personally devoted hours of his own time organizing alumni in the effort to reach area college days/nights and contact local school administrators.

He also has contributed financially to the institution.

"I think it's a very important thing that we realize that the university has outgrown the state," Heywood says. "I think that's one of the most important functions that alumni have to do, and there are ways to do it."

Heywood recently remarried. He and his new wife, Ann, remain involved in various real estate ventures "as a janitor and handyman."