

Bud Webster

by Suzanne B. Bopp
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Growing up on his family's sheep and cattle ranch, beside the Greybull River near Meeteetse, Constant E. "Bud" Webster's childhood days were filled with milking cows, chopping kindling, filling coal buckets for his mother's cook stove, and riding for cattle, sometimes 50 miles in a day. He attended the Webster School, until it was consolidated with the Meeteetse School; he rode a horse called Chicken that he raced during the school lunch hour. In high school, he was salutatorian of his 1931 graduating class - of two.

Webster wanted to be an accountant, so when he headed to UW - where he always knew he'd go - he took business administration and accounting courses. He belonged to Sigma Alpha Epsilon, where all the athletes belonged, and

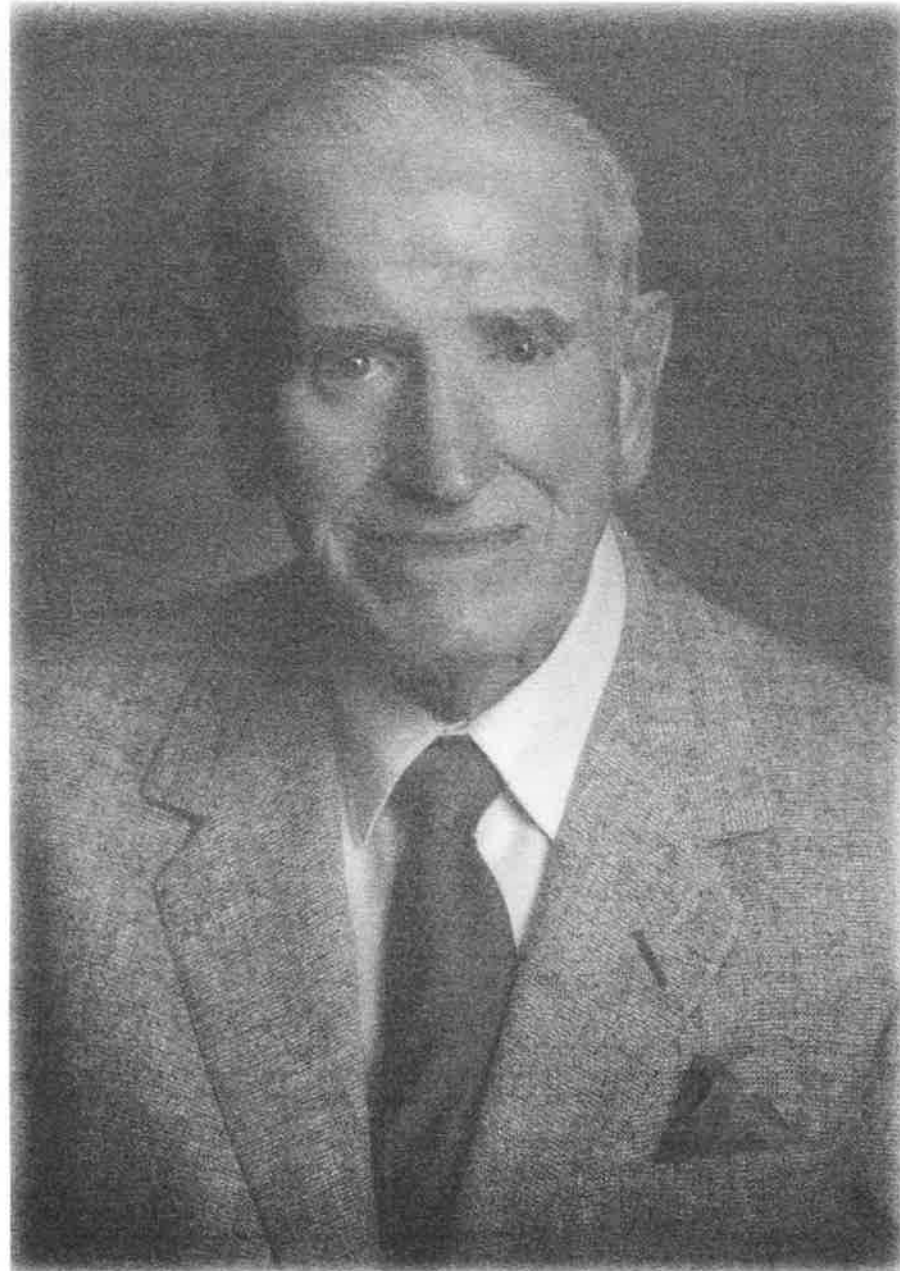
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recalls that at that time, UW never won a football game and never lost a basketball game. Webster enjoyed his college years. "As I look back on my college days, I was not the most dedicated student that ever lived," he says. "I should have a degree in campus shop." He met his future wife, Lucille Moncur, as a freshman. Marrying her three years after graduation, Webster says, was "the best deal I ever made."

When he finished his degree, Webster didn't rush out and take the CPA exam. "It was during the Depression," he says. "Things were very tough at the time. Getting a job in 1935 - they just weren't around."

But eventually he did find one - in



the accounting department of a California oil company. The pay was \$81.50 a month. He'd worked there for a while when he got a surprise call from the Wyoming State Board of Equalization offering him a job as a field auditor. He decided right away to take it. "It paid \$150 a month and it was home," he says.

His life took an unexpected turn when, in 1937, he and his brother, Owen, got a chance to buy the old Yellowstone garage in Cody. His contribution to the deal was \$600 in cash and a year-old Ford. There was tremendous turnover in car dealerships at that time - and since then too: Webster has seen 30 of them come and go in Cody to date.

But Webster went ahead and signed the contract to represent Chevrolet at the age of 25. He made "You can do better with Webster" his new dealership's motto.

Times everywhere were still hard, of course, but Webster launched his business by treating his employees well from the start. Instead of paying only a commission, Webster gave his employees a guaranteed salary, with bonuses

for sales or production beyond the base, and they came through those years in the black. His consideration to his employees is the same today, and is evident in their loyalty. As his business manager says, "When you come to work for Bud Webster, you stay, and you stay, and you stay."

The same goes for his customers; he has one of the highest repeat buyer percentages in the country. Among his dearest friends are many who started out as customers.

In 1941 Webster bought out his brother's interest in the dealership. When WWII came along, Webster survived on tire sales. He bought when worried tire dealers wanted to sell, and became one of the few places customers with rationing board-issued certificates could find tires. Meanwhile, GM promised car dealers who kept buying cars until their production stopped an equal number of new Chevys when production resumed again after the war. Webster took that offer, kept buying cars, and kept his staff on salary. They made it through.

As time passed, Webster's success

continued. He opened a car lot at the main intersection in Cody. In 1958, he was appointed Buick's Cody dealer. By 1983, he had an entire block of Cody. In 1987, he built a brand new dealership building. In 1989, he earned Time magazine's Quality Dealer Award. In 1997, he marked his 60th year as the Chevy dealer in Cody - the longest operating Chevy dealership in the country.

Somehow, he's found time for other business ventures too. He bought the Coca Cola bottling company in Thermopolis in 1943 and operated it for 36 years. In 1946, he became the director of the Shoshone Bank, and was in that position for 40 years. In 1948, he bought the Chevy dealership in Powell and had that for four years.

And he's found time to be involved in many community activities in Cody. He's been on the board of trustees of the Buffalo Bill Historical Center for several years and has served as chairman of the hospital board. He started, and finished, the Chief Joseph Highway, from Cody through Sunlight Basin connecting to the Beartooth Highway near Cooke City, Mont., which he calls "one of my greatest accomplishments." Appointed by Governor Cliff Hansen to be the commissioner from his district, Webster says, "I had a great opportunity to do something." The 31-mile highway took 31 years to build.

Webster has never forgotten the role that UW played in his life. "My relationship with UW has been very rewarding," says Webster, whose family was selected in 2000 as UW's Family of the Year. Eight of 14 family members are UW graduates. "I told my children they could go to any college anywhere - as long as it was in Wyoming," he says.

His UW degree has been of direct help to him in his business success, Webster says. "I know my degree persuaded Chevrolet to let me sign the contract at the age of 25." His accounting knowledge has helped him greatly through the years, even earned him a compliment from an IRS representative, who commented that Webster knew his business as well as anyone he'd ever seen - as Webster himself says, he knows it from "stem to stern."

At the age of 90, Webster still works every day, Saturdays included. In 2001, he even expanded his business, acquiring Cadillac, Pontiac and GMC franchises. "I'm the luckiest person in the world," he says, "and I'm having the time of my life."

He likes to summarize his philosophy with some words he read many years ago that stuck in his mind: "Give life the best that's in you, for it's only a one night stand. There are no repeat performances brought back by popular demand." Words to live by, indeed. ♣