

ROSS GORMAN

Founder of W. Kelowna lumber mill dies at 93

By **RON SEYMOUR** Oct 20
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Ross Gorman, a "reluctant businessman" who helped build West Kelowna's largest private sector employer, has died.

He was 93.

Despite his age, he was still going into the sawmill that bears the family name on a regular basis before his death last Friday.

Gorman founded the mill as a box-making venture with his brother John in the early 1950s as a way to supplement their income when the family's orchards were severely damaged by frost.

"In some ways, dad was a reluctant businessman," Ron Gorman, Gorman Bros. Lumber Ltd.'s chief executive officer, said Sunday. "It was supposed to be just a temporary measure, but it took off and just kept expanding over the years."

Ross Gorman was a pioneer in advocating for added-value production, extracting as much possible economic benefit from the wood supply, rather than just shipping raw product. He and his brother also presided over a workplace culture that rewarded loyalty, long service, and community involvement.



Ross Gorman

"Gorman's is a non-union shop, which is very rare for a sawmill," West Kelowna Mayor Doug Findlater said. "They pay well, but people just love working there, and they truly do think of themselves as a big family."

"Ross Gorman was a very fine gentleman in every sense of the word," Findlater added. "That helped him build the mill up into a successful business with an international reach."

Gorman's mill in West Kelowna employs 350 people, and the company has several other operations for a total workforce of about 1,000. When the West Kelowna mill was threatened by a forest fire in 2009, many of its employees turned out to help firefighters beat back the flames.

John Gorman retired in 1996 and died in 2002. Ross was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease 20 years ago, but was still taking an active interest in the affairs of the family-owned company. He did not, however, have a formal title. "We just called him the owner," Ron Gorman said.

A funeral service will be held on Saturday.