

APRIL 7, 1921 – OCT. 17, 2014

Ross Gorman: Industry pioneer, family man

Special to The Daily Courier

Ross Gorman was born at home, in the community of Glenrosa, on April 7, 1921. The youngest of four children, he grew up during the Great Depression. Life was simple, but busy, as the family worked the small farm. Although his horizons were limited to going no further than a horse or his feet could take him, his life was rich with cousins and friends living on surrounding farms. Despite the Depression, the farm provided plenty of food, and his father frequently invited transients in for a meal.

At the age of six, Ross started attending the one-room school house in Glenrosa, and was taught by his sister, Helen Gorman. He was back in the little building on Sunday; the desks were pushed aside, and the building served as a church. Ross's Christian faith was important to him, and he accepted Jesus as his Saviour at a young age.

After attending high school in Westbank, Ross worked at a cannery in Kelowna, before moving to Vancouver where he worked as a welder in the shipyards. During the Second World War, he continued to work as a welder in camps in Radium and at Blubber Bay (Texada Island).

Ross met Eunice Alves through his sister, Helen.

Helen invited Eunice to visit the Okanagan in October 1944, and Eunice recalled boarding the bus and then changing to a train for the long trip to the Okanagan, wondering if her life was going to change forever because of that trip. Both Ross and Eunice's lives changed, they fell in love, and were married on May 17, 1946.

Ross and Eunice were orchardists, growing apples, cherries and peaches.

However, the winter of 1949-50 changed the course of his life. Harsh frosts killed a significant portion of the orchards belonging to Ross and his brother John, so at the age of 29, Ross and John decided to buy scrap lumber from local sawmills and re-saw it into fruit box components.

The brothers saw this as a temporary solution, until their replanted orchards started producing fruit. This was the birth of what became Gorman Bros. Lumber.

When the company was officially formed, they chose the Biblical motto "a good name is more desirable than great riches," as their company's guiding principle. The impact on the employees and the community were always the key consider-



Photo contributed

Ross Gorman

ations when making business decisions.

Over the years Gorman Bros. expanded, and in addition to the sawmill on the original plant site in Westbank, there are operations in Revelstoke, Canoe, Lumby and Oroville, Wash., currently employing over 1,200 people. Ross was a pioneer in the forest industry, and had a passion for value added. Making sure nothing went to waste by recovering trim ends from lumber, and then producing finger joint edge glued panels was a source of great satisfaction to him.

In 2012, Ross was awarded a commemorative medal for the Queen's Diamond Jubilee. In 2007 he received an honorary degree from Okanagan College, receiving the award of Honourary Fellow. In 1998, he was awarded Business Leader of the Year from the City of Kelowna, and in 1997, he was awarded the Paul Bunyan Award by the Canadian Wood Council.

Throughout the years of growth and change in the business, Ross continued to take a hands-on approach. There were few things he enjoyed more than pushing dirt with the D6 Caterpillar, and right up until he passed away, the first place to look for Ross was out on the tractor, where he could be found mowing his acreage.

Ross was a "people person." To him, the most important part of running a business, was the people. In addition to participating in many forest-industry committees and community boards, he found time to teach his six children to ski and ride horses, do an annual hike to look at wild flowers in the spring, take his Sunday School class of boys hiking, and dress up as Santa at the Gorman Bros. employees children's Christmas party. He and Eunice provided a loving home to a number of foster children over the

years. As a grandfather, he took the time to take each of his 15 grandchildren and their grandmother on their own special trip.

Ross loved the outdoors. He never failed to marvel at the beauty of nature, and never took it for granted. He was able to travel extensively, and enjoyed the diversity of nature found around the world. He loved to read, and as he got older and had more time to read, his extensive library covered a very wide range of topics. He cared deeply for his business and employees, and went to the office every day, right up to the day before he passed away.

Ross Gorman passed away suddenly, at the age of 93, with his wife Eunice by his side. He is survived by Eunice and his six children; Ror (Jennifer) Gorman, Esther (Andrew) Scott, Carolyn Gorman, Marjorie (John) Wiens, Mary (Doug) Tracey Louise (Nick) Arkle; 15 grandchildren and 12 great grandchildren.

A memorial service will be held at Trinity Baptist Church, Saturday at 10:30 a.m.

Donations in memory of Ross Gorman can be made to: Parkinson Society (parkinson.ca), Maple Springs Bible Camp (maplesprings.ca) or Westside Community Food Bank (westsidefoodbank.ca).