

Honourary Life Members

Dean Salsman

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How does a boy from Nova Scotia's Annapolis Valley end up traveling the world, associating with royalty and national leaders and working closely with some of the largest corporations in the world? According to Dean Salsman you apply the principles learned in youth, work hard and offer to do a little extra.

Salsman's hometown, Waterville, Kings County, NS, played a significant role in his future career. The Annapolis Valley's rural and agricultural roots make its young men no strangers to hard work. Indeed, Salsman remembers starting his working life sharing the experience of most Valley youth of his generation, helping local farmers in the apple orchards. He eventually left Waterville to pursue what he thought would be a military career, but it was to his hometown that he would turn a few years later, after making the decision to start his own business.

He joined the Royal Canadian Navy in 1942, serving five years before being granted a discharge in 1947. Salsman says his original plan was to become a career officer in the service, but the changes of the post war years made it clear to him his future didn't lie with the Navy.

He was encouraged to leave the Navy, and became an estimator for Salsman & Sons Ltd., a painting contractor from Wolfville, NS. While working there he met two individuals who would greatly influence his future: R.B. Cameron, a general contractor from New Glasgow, and Sandy Reeves, a young engineer working with Superline Oils Ltd., one of the many companies owned by Fred Manning.

"Mr. Cameron was expanding and he would go on to become one of Nova Scotia's great industrialists. He encouraged me to leave the painting business and work

for him. This gave me a great insight into the business world," Salsman says.

He continues, "My friendship with Sandy continued, and in 1951 he told me of his plans to leave Superline and establish his own general contracting business. After many conversations with him, I decided to strike out on my own as a painting contractor. My theory was that if I could make a profit for someone as an estimator, then maybe I could make a profit for myself on my own."

When Salsman presented his plans to leave Cameron, his former employer gave him tremendous encouragement and support. "We met frequently through the years and reviewed many business plans and opportunities," Salsman recalls. "Later on he invited me to join the Board of Maritime Steel and Foundries Ltd., one of his many companies. I valued his friendship."

This desire to build a future on his own terms is something Salsman recognized and even encouraged in the people who later worked with and for him. "During the years of operating the company there were those who went out on their own as I had, and I always tried to help them. Some went on to become successful business people and I'm always grateful for the opportunity to be a part of that. I always give full credit to anyone with the initiative to start something of their own."

Salsman went back to his Waterville roots for help in getting his new company started, joining forces with hometown boys Gerald and Francis Parker to form Parker Brothers Limited painting contractors. As he did in his turn, Salsman was able to count on support for his efforts from both his former employer Cameron and his friend Reeves in those early days.

"I did the estimating and handled the business administration side of things while Gerald and Francis were the on-site people, either doing the work or acting as foremen. We were fortunate in that there was a lot of expansion taking place at the time, and we got a number of small jobs to start. Some of the general contractors were very good to us," Salsman says.

The contracts got increasingly larger, including a large contract for the Westmount Subdivision in Halifax. The entire scope of the company changed in the mid-1950s when Parker Brothers began looking at work outside of Nova Scotia.

"One day I got a call from Charlotte, North Carolina; a contractor there was bidding on a US Air Force base in Stephenville, Newfoundland and invited us to bid on the painting part of the contract," Salsman says. "I remember meeting with him here in town and the plans for the project were more than six inches thick. I was a little overwhelmed at first at the sheer scope of the project."

He quickly overcame the shock, and Parker Brothers won the contract. "The project was worth more than \$100,000—that was a huge painting contract at the time. It opened up a large number of opportunities for us in Newfoundland and Labrador."

This was just the start of the company's regional operations. In 1955 Salsman formed Atlantic Painters Limited, and went on to purchase A.N. Clark & Son Limited in Moncton, NB in 1960 and organized Highland Painting Contractors Limited of Sydney in 1962.

Although Parker Brothers continues to operate today, Salsman started to become heavily involved in other areas by the early 1970s and eventually sold the company in 1984. Francis Parker, one of the founders, left the company after only a couple years, while his brother Gerald remained with Salsman for 20 years before selling out his interest.

"I spent 34 profitable years in the construction industry and it was very good to me," Salsman says. "It's a tremendous industry; it features great risks and responsibility but it also offers great rewards."

Salsman certainly didn't lack things to do outside of Parker Brothers. He served as president of the Construction Association of Nova Scotia (then called the Halifax-Dartmouth Construction Association) where he strongly championed better apprenticeship training and the selection of local construction firms over 'foreign' firms for government contracts.

"What I remember most about those years is the coming together of the industry to make things better for everyone. The setting of uniform standards, formalizing the bidding system and establishing the bid depository all improved the industry tremendously. In my term as president I was fortunate to follow some very good leaders and had some equally good ones coming up behind me," Salsman says.

Perhaps his largest contribution to Nova Scotia started in 1971 when he was invited to join the Board of Directors of Industrial Estates Limited (IEL), the provincial agency charged with developing NS' industrial base and attracting foreign investors. In 1972 he was appointed president and CEO, and traveled throughout North America, Europe and Japan promoting his home province before stepping down in 1978.

"It was a great opportunity for me," Salsman says. "Don MacInnon was a great help to me, and basically took over the running of the company for the years I was involved with IEL. That allowed me to concentrate on such things as the negotiations that encouraged Volvo, Michelin, Crossley's and many other companies to establish or expand in the province."

He also served several years as Honourary Counsel for the Netherlands in Halifax, earning special recognition from the Queen of the Netherlands in 1993 when she made him an Officer of the Order of Orange Nassau.

"I was actually visiting the Mayor (Ron Wallace) at the same time he was playing host to a Dutch delegation, and was informed the Consul General wanted to speak with me," Salsman recalls. "I traveled a lot during my time with IEL and they had my name as someone interested in aiding Nova Scotia, so they asked me to become Honourary Counsel. In that capacity I handled such things as issuing passports, dealing with Dutch ships that came into port and acted as a central point for mail and payroll to assemble when Dutch naval ships put into Halifax."

Although 'officially' retired now, Salsman remains active. "Over the years I developed a fairly extensive investment and real estate portfolio, so after I sold Parker Brothers I placed everything in Salsman Investments Limited. It's sort of a family organization, and that's what keeps me busy now—looking after those operations."