

# In Memoriam

## Raymond J. Noonan Sr.



On April 22, 2008, the industry lost a beloved member and veteran. Raymond J. Noonan Sr., founder of Cascade Lumber Co., passed away peacefully at the age of 90 in Cascade, IA.

A native of Chicago, Ray graduated with a B.A. in English from St. Ambrose College (Davenport, IA) in 1939. He served as a communications

officer in the Navy during World War II, and was discharged with the rank of lieutenant in 1945. He married the love of his life, Mary, in 1947, and they moved to Cascade. "He had more of a liking for the Iowa area," explained son Mike Noonan. "He liked the people, he liked the topography, and he liked the lack of traffic jams."

Ray saw the shortage of building materials that followed WWII and decided to start Cascade Lumber Company in 1953, to which he would dedicate the next 55 years of his business career.

"His was an innovative and pioneering spirit with which he grew the business," Mike said. Selling and installing building materials was the company's focus, but he soon saw prefabricated building components as an opportunity to speed up the building process. "Dad was always the kind of person looking to see what he could do to [fill] a need that wasn't being filled," shared Mike.

His entrance to the structural building components industry soon followed; the company started building wood roof trusses and wall panels. When the roller press was invented, it allowed Ray's company to mass produce components at a lower cost. In 1963, Ray established Cascade Mfg Co to manufacture, market and sell prefabricated wood trusses. Soon Cascade tapped into what would become its largest area of business: selling components to lumber yards. "It was a seamless and natural transition from making components for our own use and resale to making them for the use of other lumberyards," recalled son Ray Noonan Jr. "As other lumberyards became aware of this 'new' product, they asked us to provide trusses for their jobs, so we responded to their needs."

Ray worked tirelessly to ensure the business' success during a time when prefabricated components were not yet embraced by the construction industry in the Midwest. "Back then our trusses were mostly used in agriculture buildings, since we could make a then unheard of 40-foot long span," noted Ray Jr. Ray also was an early proponent of colored steel roofing panels, wood foundations and post framed building packages.

Ray's hard work paid off. Today, Cascade Manufacturing Company has four plants (one each in Eldridge and Pleasantville, and two in Cascade) and has grown to over 275 employees. The growth was beyond what Ray Sr. had ever imagined. In 2003, he told the Dubuque Telegraph Herald that he was taken aback at how expansive the company had become. "I never thought it would be as big or as comprehensive as it is today," he said.

The company's success was likely due to Ray being the kind of businessman everyone loved to work with. "He was always making fun of himself as a way to make other people feel better about themselves," recalled Mike. His generosity in giving credit where it was due was also a well known trait. "He would say that we all, as a team, have made this business do well," Mike said. While he had a great deal of pride in the accomplishments he made over the past 55 years, Ray remained to the very end a modest and unassuming man. Like most people he appreciated positive comments, but was never blinded by his own successes. "In that sense he was a great role model for me as a business owner and a father."

His humility was an impression Ray made on all of his children. Eventually all four sons (Ray Jr., Mike, Pat and John) and his daughter (Mary Beth and her husband John) came to work in the business. This interest has even been passed onto several third generation family members who have joined the family business.

Throughout his career, Ray was involved in several professional organizations including the National Lumbermen's Association, the Northwestern Lumbermen's Association and the Iowa Lumbermen's Association (which awarded him Lumber Dealer of the Year in 2003.) Ray Jr. recalled, "He had a deep love for the industry that served him and that he served. Our involvement in WTCA has its roots in his lumber association involvement."

He was also active in his community currently serving on the boards of the Cascade Communications Company and Tri-County Historical Society. In addition he was a member of the Knights of Columbus.

Ray unofficially retired from Cascade in 1989, although he continued to serve as a chairman of the board up until his passing. For those who knew Ray, it was a well known fact that if he wasn't at 7 a.m. mass, he was most likely at the lumberyard.

Mike described his father as a devoted family man who was very active in his community and in his industry, and he said that Ray's interests were pretty straightforward. "His hobbies were basically his family, his work and raising cattle on his farm."

Ray Sr. is preceded in death by Mary, his wife of 53 years. He is survived by five children, 19 grandchildren and 19 great-grandchildren, his sister and several nieces and nephews. **SBC**

Submissions to "In Memoriam" can be emailed to [editor@sbc-mag.info](mailto:editor@sbc-mag.info). Photos are encouraged and will run as space allows. Submissions may be edited for grammar, length and clarity.

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