

Ewald Rempel's Abbotsford Legacy Story

June 1, 2017

As the undersigned, I promise to contribute to the future of the community of Abbotsford through a bequest to the Abbotsford Community Foundation



Sometimes people surprise you. The story of Ewald Rempel's life is a story of surprises. As a child living in Manitoba with his family who had immigrated from Russia, he developed a serious illness where he had a constant fever and a sore on his leg that wouldn't heal. His sister Hertha recalled that he was in the hospital in Winnipeg for quite a long stay but no improvement.

Some thought he wouldn't survive but he did. His parents Dietrich and Margaret heard that BC had built its first Children's Hospital in Vancouver and so they uprooted their family of four children from Manitou, Manitoba and drove for 10 days in a "Star" car that barely made it across the mountains until they arrived in Yarrow. They took seven year old Ewald to what was then called the BC Crippled Children's Hospital (now BC

Children's Hospital). "The doctors immediately did the necessary surgery but because of the delay there was a long period of recovery," Hertha said. His leg was in traction for six months and in total he spent 18 months in the hospital.

When he left the hospital Ewald returned to his new home in Abbotsford where the family moved while he was in the hospital. He attended Huntingdon Elementary School with his brother George who would give Ewald a ride to school on his bike with Ewald sitting on the handle bars. Something that Ewald never forgot and was always grateful to George for doing.

When his parents went into the strawberry business Ewald, despite their protests, quit high school to help with the planting. Ewald decided if the business was going to be successful he would have to help.

It turned out Ewald had a head for business. He started with gravel trucks and then in 1964 his brother Clarence started a concrete business and invited Ewald to join him. In 1967 their brother Ed also joined the company and it became Rempel Brothers Concrete. They operated the business until 1988. Over the years they developed several other construction related companies and branched out to other areas in the Valley and did business in Thompson Manitoba and Northern Alberta.

While serving as President of Rempel Brothers, Ewald would oversee operations and finances and he became very good at business, particularly considering he hadn't finished high school, said his wife Ethel.

Ethel also worked at Rempel Brothers where she oversaw administration while raising their son, Jackie. Ethel recalls that Ewald had been the president of the BC Ready Mix Association and President of the BC Home Builder's Association during his career.

While Rempel Brothers was involved in the construction of many of the buildings created for Expo 86, Ewald formed a friendship with Jimmy Pattison. "We attended a dinner at that time where Prince Charles and Diana were in attendance and the dress I wore at the dinner was featured in a Vancouver magazine," Ethel said.

After selling the concrete business, Ewald joined the board of Fraser Valley Credit Union which later became Prospera Credit Union and served as chair for 18 years. His leadership was recognized by Prospera, after he passed away in 1993, with a creation of a sundial in his memory in the lobby of the credit's union Clearbrook branch. For a man who never finished high school Ewald did surprising well.

There are two grandchildren, Andy and Jennifer, who now have children of their own. When Andy was five he developed juvenile diabetes. He is now 36 years old, works in his father's business and lives a full life. Ethel's brothers' great grand-daughter Chloe had cancer. She is now 9 years old and cancer free. In both cases it was BC Children's Hospital that helped them when they were ill. The same hospital that helped Ewald in 1933.

The Prospera Ewald Rempel Memorial Endowment Fund was created in memory of Ewald and is held by Abbotsford Community Foundation. The income from the fund provides support for health organizations that treat children and in recent years, BC Children's Hospital has received support from the fund split equally between programs for children's cancer and juvenile diabetes.

Ethel Rempel