



Henry Turrish Swigert

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Henry “Hank” Swigert, a native of Portland, Oregon, is widely respected for his distinguished career as an industrialist, civic leader, and champion of the mining and forest products industries. An ardent supporter of the World Forestry Center from its inception in 1966, Hank has served as a director and highly respected advisor to the organization throughout its evolution.

Hank was born on October 20, 1930, to Ernest and Frances Swigert. He was named after his maternal grandfather, Henry Charles Turrish (1864-1934), a true timber baron who in the early 1900s owned or controlled vast timberlands in Oregon, Idaho, Washington, and Wisconsin.

Hank’s education began at the Hillside School (later renamed the Catlin Gable School) in the west hills of Portland. Like his father and uncles before him, Hank went east, first to the Milton Academy in Massachusetts and then on to Harvard University. There, he earned a degree in the liberal arts, majoring in business. Following graduation, he served two years in the United States Army Signal Corps.

Hank was 25 when he began his business career by joining a Swigert family enterprise, ESCO Corporation. Founded in 1913 by his paternal grandfather, C.F. Swigert, and headquartered in northwest Portland, it was an up-and-coming manufacturer of steel wear parts used in logging, mining, and heavy construction. By 1955, Hank’s uncle, Fred Swigert, had taken over the helm as its chairman. But young Hank was intent on learning the business from the ground up. So he started working in the company’s foundry on Northwest Vaughn Street where the steel castings were made. There, he learned firsthand how molten metal was prepared and poured into sand molds to form tough steel alloy castings. He could directly observe how ESCO welders fabricated huge shovel dippers and dragline buckets used in the surface mining of coal, copper, gold, and iron ore.

After stints in the foundry and the inside sales desk, Hank was promoted to an outside sales position, serving copper mining organizations and other customers in Arizona, Nevada, and northern Mexico. “It was a rewarding experience,” he would later recall, “calling mostly on mining customers and some cement and aircraft manufacturers as well. There was no pleasure like getting an order you’d worked hard to secure. Those years gave me an appreciation for the challenges field salesmen have interfacing with the customer as well as the home office.”

Returning to Portland, Hank served in a variety of management positions before being named vice president for finance in 1969 and executive vice president in 1976. During that time, ESCO’s sales expanded greatly. To serve its growing customer base, ESCO added several North American manufacturing plants and signed license agreements with high-quality foundries around the globe. Hank traveled extensively, calling on ESCO’s licensees, dealers and customers. His honest and affable approach helped cement business relationships both across the country and abroad.

Although mining and heavy construction were ESCO’s prime markets, the company served the forest products industry in a robust way as well. ESCO manufactured an array of steel rigging parts for wire rope such as the popular Bardon choker

hook, and their engineers designed a feller-buncher saw and hydraulic skidder grapples that enabled tractors to grab and haul bundles of felled trees out of logging sites. The company also made durable cast steel alloy chain used in sawmills and huge corrosion-resistant digester components used in pulp and paper mills. As a result, the ESCO name became well known and respected in the woods, in sawmills, and in paper manufacturing plants throughout the Pacific Northwest and beyond.

On January 1, 1979, Hank was elected chairman of ESCO’s board of directors. At the same time, Nicholas Collins was promoted to president. The excellent relationship between these two leaders proved to be of critical importance when the company was slammed by the 1982 recession. ESCO lost money for the first time since 1931 and had to initiate massive layoffs and pay cuts. “Almost anybody can manage during good times; it takes real talent to manage in a bad economy,” Hank would later reflect.

In 1984, ESCO made a bold business move when it purchased Hyster Corporation and took it private. Hyster, originally an offshoot of ESCO, was formed in 1929 with Ernest Swigert, Hank’s soon-to-be father, serving as its first president. Over the next 50 years, this Portland-based company would grow into one of the world’s leading manufacturers of lift trucks, winches and other heavy equipment used in logging and saw mills. ESCO would continue to own Hyster until 1989 when it was sold to NAACO of Cleveland, Ohio, maker of Yale lift trucks.

When the national economy rebounded in the late 1980s and early 1990s, ESCO entered a period of extraordinary growth – much of it by the acquisition of companies that offered synergy with their existing businesses. Then, in 1995, Nick Collins retired and Steven Pratt was promoted to ESCO’s president and CEO. Hank Swigert maintained continuity as chairman of the board. For the next eight years, Hank and Steve guided the company to an even higher pitch of acquisition and growth. A joint venture foundry was built in China, and other acquisitions were made in England, Australia, Belgium, Mexico, and the Slovak Republic. The company had become far more diverse and global. Annual sales grew to over \$750 million, nearly half of which came from outside the United States.

Speaking of his working relationship with Hank, CEO Steven Pratt praised Hank Swigert’s “graciousness, his ability to listen and walk with all manner of people and make them feel comfortable and respected. I also admire his great memory. He could listen to a presentation, remember the key points, and six months later ask about them in detail.” Pratt went on to say, “I often asked for his advice and insight on political and community issues, where he is well-connected.”

As board chairman at ESCO, Hank was far from being an absentee leader. Quite the opposite, he showed up daily at ESCO’s offices and made himself available not only to the executive team but to all the employees. His door was always open, and he made every employee feel welcome and respected, rarely if ever missing a company picnic, service awards banquet, family day, or other employee event. Often he took employees out to lunch to mark a significant service anniversary. With his remarkable gift for remembering the names and unique details

about hundreds of employees and their families along with his distinctly casual style, this soft-spoken principal owner never left any of ESCO’s employees feeling intimidated by his position of authority.

On May 1, 2003, at age 72, Hank announced that he was stepping down as ESCO Corporation’s chairman of the board. He would, however, continue as a director, consulting closely with Steven Pratt, who was elected to replace him as chairman. Hank had been a director since 1958 and had served as chairman for over 23 years. His challenge was now to preserve the unique culture and values that the Swigert family had imbued upon ESCO for nearly a century.

Outside of his relationship with ESCO, Hank became involved in a number of civic and business organizations. He was elected to the board of directors of the Western Forestry Center in 1972 and has remained on its board ever since. An ardent proponent of free enterprise, he became a director of the influential Associated Oregon Industries in 1971 and later served as its chairman and as a trustee of the Associated Oregon Industries Foundation. Additionally, he served as a director of the Portland Chamber of Commerce, presiding as its chairman in 1981. In 1989, Hank was elected to the board of directors of the Union Bank of California. In the same year, he became a director and trustee of the Oregon Graduate Institute. He was elected director and treasurer of the Oregon Independent Colleges Foundation in 1990 and became a member of the development board of Portland State University’s School of Business Administration.

In the mid-1990s, Hank and his brother Ernest established the Swigert Foundation. This philanthropic organization, one of over one hundred foundations in Oregon, supports a broad spectrum of causes in education, health, the arts, and other worthy endeavors.

Throughout his life, Hank Swigert has been trim and athletic. He has especially enjoyed racquet sports – squash, tennis and racquetball. He shares his late father’s love of sailing and enjoyed snow skiing well into his seventies.

It was especially gratifying for Hank when, in 2013, ESCO Corporation reached its 100th anniversary. Owned then largely by family members and a number of executives and employees, ESCO had not only weathered a century of economic ups and downs, but had grown into a profitable and highly regarded steel technology firm with customers on every continent. The little steel foundry in northwest Portland that got its start making parts for logging locomotives and streetcars had become a trusted supplier to the world’s leading mines, forest products companies, turbine engine manufacturers, and other industries. And throughout its dynamic growth, Henry T. “Hank” Swigert has played a major role in building and sustaining the company, providing profits to shareholders and employment to thousands of workers. He stands today as a credit to the mining and forest products industries, and to business in general both in Oregon and far beyond. Through his leadership at ESCO, the Associated Oregon Industries, the World Forestry Center, and numerous other organizations, this beloved man has made the world a better place.