



## *Robert Boisseau Pamplin*

**1911 -**

The basic yet profound principles that are the roots of Robert Boisseau Pamplin, are also the very basis for the leadership and vision that helped him build Georgia Pacific Corporation into one of the largest forest products companies in the world.

Born in 1911 on a small family farm in Dinwiddie County, Virginia, Mr. Pamplin and his two brothers learned about hard work through the daily farm chores assigned them by their father. Whether it was freezing early winter mornings before sunrise and school, or scathingly hot summer afternoons, the youngsters dutifully performed their laborious farm responsibilities each day.

Complaints were never heard, because the “Virginia Disposition” was definite: “a true native son does not shirk the responsibilities of life.” Following suit, it wasn’t long before Mr. Pamplin assumed more direct responsibilities toward the family business. At 11 years old, he and his brother were delivering produce to customers in Petersburg.

Therefore, the core values were instilled early on by Mr. Pamplin’s parents...the values of

hard work, a solid Christian devotion, a sound education, irreproachable integrity, and love and kindness to his fellow man. These values he never deserted, and were to become the cornerstones for the direction by which he was to lead his personal and professional life.

Mr. Pamplin graduated with honors from Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University in 1933 with a degree in Business Administration and a decorated athletic career. He went on to graduate school at Northwestern University and finished a year of studies in 1934.

It was the height of the Depression, and Mr. Pamplin jumped at the accountant job offered him by Owen Cheatham, brother of his Virginia Tech roommate Julian and owner of Georgia Hardwood Lumber Company in Augusta, Georgia. Julian had advised his brother that, “If you give Robert a problem and time to think about it, he can come up with a solution.” Mr. Pamplin was hired as the company’s fifth employee. It was a good fit, and the financial management of Georgia Hardwood was enhanced by Robert’s

analytical capabilities and accounting precision.

Soon after arriving in Augusta, Mr. Pamplin met Katherine Reese. They were married in 1940, and had a son, Robert B. Pamplin, Jr., now an Oregon businessman, professor and pastor.

By 1946, Georgia Hardwood had acquired several additional mills and was flourishing. The company's first stock offering was so successful it allowed for the purchase of a plywood plant on the West Coast. Plywood was in great demand, and the company was soon able to purchase more mills. By 1947, the re-named Georgia-Pacific Plywood and Lumber Company had become the leading plywood producer, and was second in sales only to U.S. Plywood.

Now firmly established on the West Coast, company headquarters were moved to Olympia, Washington in 1953, and later to Portland, Oregon. Mr. Pamplin was named President in 1957, and G-P recorded sales of \$121 million and profits of \$7.4 million.

Georgia-Pacific's growth and success flourished under Robert Pamplin's leadership and through creativity, foresight and hard work the company paced the industry.

A key to Georgia-Pacific's success was its management structure and the types of managers the organization employed---a major imprint of Robert Pamplin. Hired for skills and expertise, G-P managers worked as individuals as well as team players. Individual judgment and decision making in their respective areas of responsibility were expected in order to get the job done.

Although managers participated in policy formulation for the company, Mr. Pamplin was the final decisionmaker. His thought process was keen and based upon analysis, judgment, practical experience and his basic principles, among them: always be honest; consider what's best for shareholders,

employees, and the community; do what's right.

Under Mr. Pamplin's guidance, Georgia-Pacific became an industry leader in efforts toward reforestation and seeking better utilization of resources. The company also set the industry trend for corporate labor policy. In 1956, Mr. Pamplin helped initiate a safety program at G-P to reduce accidents allowing the company to develop its own workman's compensation program. Over the next years, he worked hard to gain legislative passage (in 1965) of a three-way compensation bill, authorizing self-insurance, insurance by a private carrier and insurance by the state.

During the late 1950s, Georgia-Pacific recognized that with a growing market, the integration of operations would be the most feasible way to maximize company profits. Led by Robert Pamplin, in just 10 years, Georgia-Pacific built a totally integrated complex: purchasing timber; converting it to finished products; and producing some of the chemicals used in the manufacturing of the products.

During these same years, G-P created a new distribution system concept that added sophistication to its selling process. Warehouses became wholesale centers for building material distribution. Each was an independent profit center that sold at high volume to keep G-P mills running. Every center selected its own inventory and carried a wide variety of goods---some produced by G-P and some by other manufacturers. The emphasis was on volume sales and a one-stop shopping concept. By 1976, there were 150 centers across the country.

One of the more important accomplishments of Robert Pamplin and Georgia-Pacific was the development of Southern Pine plywood in the early 1960s. Under Mr. Pamplin's direction, G-P explored the feasibility of Southern Pine plywood production. With Georgia-Pacific's expertise, the industry's new technology, the raw material supply

(logs were more available in the South than in the Northwest), market conditions, and favorable labor and transportation costs in the South, the time was right. Mr. Pamplin coordinated a program of finance, production, and marketing. Georgia-Pacific built the first plant to produce Southern Pine plywood on a commercial basis at Fordyce, Arkansas. Others followed. Communities welcomed the company into their area for its operations meant progress and economic growth.

In less than a decade, Georgia-Pacific's Southern Pine plywood production commitment added prosperity to the South, and tied southern economies to the larger ones throughout the U.S. Quite possibly, Georgia-Pacific may have also saved the entire plywood industry. The supply of fir plywood was diminishing and higher prices would have severely hurt the industry. Competition was necessary to keep prices affordable for the consumer.

Creative financing plans formulated by Robert Pamplin were the crux of Georgia-Pacific's ability to grow and profit. When the Federal Trade Commission brought action against Georgia-Pacific after complaints from smaller sawmills in the South said they couldn't afford to pay the same price G-P paid for timber, Mr. Pamplin's creative genius provided the solution.

The FTC wanted Georgia-Pacific to divest itself of half of its timber resources and plywood production in the South. Instead Mr. Pamplin proposed that G-P divest itself of certain timber and plants by spinning off these assets into a separate company and distributing this company's stock to Georgia-Pacific stockholders.

The FTC agreed and Louisiana-Pacific was born in 1971. This solution saved Georgia-Pacific from losing valuable southern plywood plants. G-P employees who went to work at Louisiana-Pacific were able to keep the benefits they had earned at G-P, stockholders received a dividend, and G-P avoided a fight with the FTC.

During the time Mr. Pamplin was President and Chairman, Georgia-Pacific grew into one of the largest integrated manufacturers of plywood, lumber, gypsum, and other building products; pulp, paper and paper products; and household and market chemicals. It operated on approximately 4.5 million acres of timberlands, owned in fee, and had its own reserves of oil, natural gas and gypsum. Upon his retirement in 1976, Georgia-Pacific's annual sales had grown to \$3 billion, with net profits of \$215,000,000.

In his book *Maverick, The Story of Georgia-Pacific Corporation*, Dr. John R. Ross states that Mr. Pamplin was "without peer in the industry when he retired...in his accomplishments and in his perception and understanding of the business." Under the inspiration, discipline and vision of Mr. Pamplin and Mr. Cheatham, Georgia-Pacific became a model of good corporate management, "creating an organization that maximized profit and developed human and natural resources."

Following his retirement from the industry, Mr. Pamplin became chairman and chief executive officer of the R. B. Pamplin Corporation, whose subsidiaries on the East and West Coasts are engaged in, among other activities, concrete and textile manufacturing. A family-owned company with sales in 1995 of \$800 million, it is one of the largest private companies in Oregon.

Mr. Pamplin has led both his professional and personal life true to the principles that were instilled in him as a boy on his family's Virginia farm. Always willing to give to his fellow man, he has been generous with his talents and his wealth, and never made any fanfare to his generosity.

An avid hunter and fisherman all his life, he has always appreciated the basics and has shunned the limelight. He adheres deeply to his credence: "Make gifts while you are living. Enjoy seeing the benefits of giving." Among other beneficiaries, he has contributed to the support of Lewis & Clark

College and the University of Portland in Portland, Oregon, and to Virginia Tech, his alma mater. He served as chairman of the board at Lewis & Clark College for a number of years, and on the Board of Visitors at Virginia Tech.

Honors and awards have been many, including: in 1975, named Outstanding Chief Executive Officer in the forest paper products industries by the *Financial World* magazine panel of analysts; named "Virginian of the Year" in 1976 by the Virginia Press Association; awarded the "Golden Plate" by the American Academy of Achievement in 1976; awarded the 1978 "University of Portland Medal" in recognition of outstanding service to the university and community; in 1986 Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University named its business college the R. B. Pamplin College of Business; and received the Lee Integrity Award in 1993 from the Robert E. Lee Memorial Association.

He was further recognized with "The Aubrey R. Watzek Award" by Lewis & Clark College in 1981. A reflection of his lifetime efforts, the award it was noted is "presented to those who have pioneered in their field of endeavor and because of whom the Pacific Northwest, particularly the State of Oregon, has become the richer."