

Samuel C. Wheeler

1928-

Samuel C. Wheeler is the great-grandson of a pioneer Oregon family. The Wheeler family has been an integral part of the forest products business in the Pacific Northwest for more than 100 years. Sam's great-grandfather established the family's first sawmill operation in 1890 at Nehalem Bay, OR near the present town of Wheeler (named after the family).

Sam was born on March 7, 1928 in Portland, OR as the second son of Coleman and Virginia (Tevis) Wheeler. His father was a legendary lumberman in his own right, and was the first of the family to be honored with a memorial by the World Forestry Center.

Sam attended Gabel Country Day School, a private institution, and Lincoln High School in Portland. Following graduation from high school, he enrolled at the California Institute of Technology, majoring in chemistry. After attending Cal-Tech for two years, Sam transferred to Oregon State College (now Oregon State University) at Corvallis, Oregon where he majored in Forest Products; he graduated in 1950 with a Bachelor of Science degree. While at OSC, he joined the Alpha Gamma Rho Fraternity. During summer vacations he was employed on the survey crew at Swamp Mountain Logging Co. at Sweet Home, OR and at White Pine Lumber Co. in northern California as a choker setter and surveyor.

Following graduation from Oregon State, Sam served in the U.S. Army during

the Korean conflict. His basic training was at Fort Leonard Wood, MO, followed by advanced training at Fort Belvoir, VA. Then he was accepted for Officer Candidate School and commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the Corps of Engineers. After OCS, Sam was assigned to a training company as Company Commander, a position he held until his separation from the service in 1953.

Returning to civilian life, Sam went to work for Santiam Lumber Company in Sweet Home. He and another recent OSC forest products graduate were charged with conducting a log study to determine lumber recovery and sales advantage of various log grades. In December 1953, Sam was appointed assistant sales manager at the Western Veneer & Plywood plant in Griggs, OR. That plywood plant had been purchased by Santiam Lumber and is where Sam learned the plywood business.

In 1956, Sam spearheaded the construction of a new plywood plant for Santiam Lumber in Sweet Home. Five years later, the company expanded again with a new plant in Lebanon, OR. In this facility Sam pioneered using small logs to produce veneer and installed a continuous green chain, which eliminated the need for veneer storage trays ahead of the clipper. Sam had earned a new title, Plywood Production Manager. In one instance of his growing sophistication, Sam initiated a program at the Sweet Home plywood plant to process logs considered too defective to be

profitable at other company mills.

On October 8, 1962, the Columbus Day Storm, with its hurricane strength winds, decimated timber stands over the entire Coast Range and western flank of the Cascade Mountains from southern Oregon to southwest Washington. Companies initiated massive programs to log damaged forests on both private and public properties. With this unprecedented glut of timber available, Sam proposed construction of a veneer plant at Springfield, OR. The firm was incorporated as Mohawk Veneer Company and Sam was named as company president.

Sam's next innovation was to take Santiam Lumber Company to the southern United States. During the time he was stationed with the Army in Virginia, Sam had seen pine forests that had been planted for pulp but which had grown large enough to peel. Recalling this later, he suggested to Gene Knudson the possibilities for operating in that region. They entered into a partnership with T.L. James in Louisiana to build a plywood plant at Ruston, LA. Sam was named president of the new firm and responsible for timber supply, construction of the facility and operations. The plywood plant went into production in November 1965. This investment ultimately resulted in Willamette Industries having major business operations in the southern United States.

In 1967, Santiam Lumber Co. and Willamette Valley Lumber Co., along with

Sam was married in 1958 and is the father of four sons, John, Charles, Edward, and Thomas. All four have found success in business outside of the forest products industry. Sam has four grandchildren. In his spare time, Sam is a world traveler. He holds

their subsidiaries and joint venture operations, merged into a corporation named Willamette Industries Inc. Sam was named Vice President in charge of southern operations. With the death of his father in 1973, he resigned his position as a company officer to take care of family affairs. Sam was appointed to Willamette's board of directors in 1974, a position he held until he reached mandatory retirement age in 2000.

Following his departure from an active management role with Willamette, Sam entered into several forest products ventures. His first undertaking was to purchase an interest in Harold Barclay Logging Co. in Sisters, OR. Later he bought the remaining interest and renamed the company Barclay Contractors to better reflect the breadth of the firm's business activity. He continues involvement with this company as vice president.

Sam continued to pursue interests in the plywood industry and bought two Boise Cascade plants in Midway and Albany, OR. These operations were incorporated as Wheeler Lumber Co. He later sold the facilities due to a downturn in the plywood market coupled with scarcity of timber from public forests. In 1988, he joined with another lumberman to acquire a sawmill at Toledo, OR, naming this operation Wheeler Manufacturing Co. The firm operated successfully for three years but then was forced to shut down due to scarcity of timber from public forests.

the distinction of having visited more than 100 countries.

Perhaps Sam's greatest contribution has been his willingness to share the fruits of his success with his hometown of Portland

and native state of Oregon. Like many lumbermen before him, he has generously made his time and wealth available for community and charitable undertakings. Sam has been a member of the board of directors of the World Forestry Center since 1979. He served as chairman of the board in 1987-88. Sam is a long-time board member and past president of the Keep Oregon Green Association. He is a past chairman of the board of the Oregon State University Foundation, and past president of the Oregon Historical Society and the Cascade Pacific Council of the Boy Scouts of America. Sam is also a director of the De Paul Treatment Center and St. Vincent Medical Foundation and a member of the board of trustees of Lewis and Clark College. Through the Wheeler Foundation, Sam has been a generous contributor to all these organizations and many other worthy causes.

Sam Wheeler's contributions as a manager and innovator in the plywood business helped better utilize and protect forest resources for the benefit of society. He has been a true leader in promoting the missions and programs of the World Forestry Center and a host of other worthy organizations. If the Wheeler family history is part and parcel of the history and development of Oregon, then Samuel C. Wheeler has upheld his family legacy well to the benefit of all Oregonians.

January 2002