



John C. Hampton

1926-2006

Fortunately for the forest products industry and the Pacific Northwest, John Hampton decided to stop by his father's Portland, Oregon, office in 1947 on his way to Tacoma, Washington, to look for a job. That's when L. M. "Bud" Hampton suggested to his son that while he contemplated occupations he might as well work at the family sawmill.

From that proposal emerged the innovation and leadership to help grow the family's forest products company, Hampton Affiliates, into the largest lumber manufacturer in Oregon, and to provide the industry with, what some have called, the "foremost spokesman for managed use of forest resources" in the last half of the century.

John Hampton was born in Tacoma in 1926. His father Bud owned a retail lumber company there and during World War II's lumber shortage bought a sawmill in Willamina, Oregon along with 11,000 acres of nearby timber to provide his own direct log supply.

Although John graduated in 1947 from the University of Washington with a degree in economics, he spent most of his college years training for the Navy as an Ensign in the U.S. Naval Reserve Officer Training Program. After graduation, with no war to fight, he signed on as a liberty ship seaman and traveled to Japan. It was on his return that he took his dad up on his suggestion.

John worked the night shift at the Willamina sawmill until 1949. After John worked another year at a Portland wholesale firm, Bud Hampton asked him to start a wholesale lumber company, Hampton Lumber Sales.

That same year, 1950, he married his wife Carol. The Hamptons raised four children, two sons and two daughters.

He continued to run the Portland wholesale business until the mid-1950s. With the purchase of a veneer mill in California, and a sawmill in Canada, Bud was spending more time away from the office, and when unreachable, John was making the operational decisions at the sawmill with the plant manager. He continued to help run the business and was named CEO of Willamina Lumber Co. and its affiliates when Bud retired in 1970.

By 1999, Hampton Affiliates included Hampton Resources, Inc., Hampton Lumber Sales Co., Hampton Tree Farms, Inc., and Hampton Lumber Mills, Inc. with total of more than 1,000 employees.

John's abilities to achieve and succeed seem to come from his deep commitment to both human and natural resources. His perseverance to forge creative solutions, his ability to build coalitions, his power to motivate, and his pledge to action have paved his chosen path.

These qualities were obvious in the late 1960s when he confronted the issue that actually began "his transformation from small-time sawmill operator to industry figurehead."

Hampton Resources built its business on a small volume of private timber which it supplemented with federal timber. In 1968, log exports from federal lands were increasing at what John felt was an "alarming rate" a rate that threatened the continuance and growth of his company.

He "got involved," worked with other industry members through trade organizations and successfully helped bring about limitations on federal land log exports west of the 100th meridian. It was his first state of what a coalition could do, "eye opener," he once commented.

"I hadn't been involved in trade associations and I didn't understand the value of what we could do together instead of acting individually." John recalled later.

John stayed involved. His tireless fight for a "predictable and reasonable public timber supply to sustain his industry and rural communities" by seeking constructive solutions has made him a respected and revered spokesman for the industry. He was the industry's representative to President Clinton's Oregon Forestry Summit held in Portland in 1993.

Further recognition of his influential leadership by the industry includes instrumental positions: director and past president, Western Wood Products Association; director and chair, executive board, World Forestry Center; director, American Forest & Paper Association; director and vice chair, National Forest Products Association; past chairman, Northwest Forest Resource Council; nine years on the Oregon State Board of Forestry (appointments by Governors McCall, Atiyeh, and Straub).

Such high profile positions also helped John communicate the industry's side of the public timber supply debate to the rest of the populace, something that he sees as imperative if there is to be a balance between environmental concerns and economic and human considerations.

He believes that educating the public about Oregon and Washington's Forest Practices Acts, and the current "extraordinary" job of state and private timberlands management will help change public opinion. Congress will respond to public opinion and the laws restricting public timber access are bound to change if the public understands that modern forest management is environmentally friendly.

Part of the charge that fuels John into these industry causes are his roots as an independent sawmiller and his total, constant consideration for employees. Because Hampton Affiliates is an independent company, it must do more with less. Without a large timber base, the company must stay on the cutting edge of technology and management techniques. "Our employees must be better motivated, educated and trained," John has always contended.

As CEO, he valued and counted on input from everyone-hourly employees and management-on how to make the company most effective and profitable. His ability to motivate and his “participatory management” system resulted in a tightly coordinated team of hourly employees and managers collaborating to develop and plan improvements for better efficiency and production.

John’s willingness to embrace technology and his employees’ sophistication and knowledge helped to achieve effective productivity. (In 1974 the company installed the first overhead end-logging system at a random length mill in the U.S.— a Swedish patented small-log headrig at Willamina.)

He motivated employees to learn about the latest technological advancements and evaluate them. John was always open to new ideas and took into account recommendations from all employees. He was proud that most suggestions for improvement came from the “bottom up” instead of being completely management directed.

John Hampton’s management, business beliefs and actions have proven effective. By 1999, Hampton Affiliates held 182,000 acres of timberland in the Northwest. The company supplements its own supply of raw materials with timber purchased from state and federal government, open market suppliers, and small woodland owners.

Six sawmill complexes in the Northwest are operated with state-of-the-art technology and skilled professionals. Combined, these mills produced more than 800 million board feet per year in the late 1990s, which at the time made Hampton Affiliates the second largest lumber manufacturer in the Pacific Northwest and the largest in Oregon.

In that same period, Hampton Lumber Sale, one of the nation’s largest wholesalers, marketed some 1.5 billion board feet to both domestic and overseas markets. A subsidiary, California Builders Supply, distributed windows and door. Also, Construction Materials Inc. Northwest, a distribution/reload center specializing on lumber, plywood and engineered wood products, added in with sales in Washington, Oregon and California.

A notable area of focus for Hampton Affiliates is its forest practices. Some 400 to 700 trees are planted on each acre harvested, with a total of 2.5 million seedlings planted in a typical winter. Hampton foresters work to facilitate wildlife, water, and recreation, and complete several stream enhancement projects each year.

John continued his quest on educating about forests and forestry even after his retirement as CEO of the Hampton companies in 1995. He remained Hampton Affiliates chairman of the board of directors.

John Hampton’s contributions have not been solely to the wood products industry. He and his wife Carol have been vital supporters of community activities and causes.

In 1999, John took the helm as Chairman of the Oregon Community Foundation, which has a fund balance in excess of \$300 million and aggressively promotes and encourages philanthropy throughout the state.

He is past chair of the Portland Opera Association and former director of the Oregon Symphony. In the early 80’s, he took an idea to provide long-term funding for Portland’s three major art institutions (Opera, Art Museum, and Symphony) and spearheaded what is now the Oregon Arts Heritage Endowment Fund. He leveraged his contributions—monetary and non-monetary—to bring the fund to its potential.

By 1999, the fund was in excess of \$15 million. It is managed and administered by the Oregon Community Foundation with equal funding to each organization totaling more than \$750,000 per year. Since its founding, it has distributed over \$50 million through June 1999.

The Hampton family also supports the Portland Art Museum, Oregon Historical Society, The Northwest Academy, Portland Institute for Contemporary Arts, Portland Center Stage, OMSI, Pacific Northwest College of Art, and the High Desert Museum.

John has served in other key positions: senior director on the Oregon Business Council; director for nine years at the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco; director for 13 years of PacifiCorp; and past chair of the St. Vincent Hospital & Medical Center Advisory Board.

Honors have been many: 1989 National Forest Products Association “Forestry Industry Leader Award;” 1990 Lewis and Clark College “Aubrey R. Watzek Award” for his achievement in his field, and “because of whom the Pacific Northwest, and particularly the State of Oregon has been enriched;” Portland Opera Association’s 1992 “Aubrey N. Morgan Award;” 1993 Timber Processing Magazine’s “Man of the Year Award;” 1993 Portland Wholesale Lumber Association’s “Man of the Year Award;” 1994 North American Wholesale Lumber Association’s “John J. Mulrooney Memorial Award;” 1999 Northwest Business Committee for Arts & Culture’s “Breakfast of Champions Honoree.”

When John Hampton received the 1990 Aubrey R. Watzek Award, it was presented by his good friend Harry Merlo, then Chairman and President of Louisiana Pacific Corporation.

In his presentation remarks, Mr. Merlo summed up a portrait of John Hampton most appropriately: “...over the past 40 years John has become recognized as a selfless contributor of his energy and his resources, giving over and over again to improve the quality of life in our beautiful Pacific Northwest.... Whether it be the rural mill town of Willamina or the City of Portland, the way John Hampton looks after his community truly personifies the Oregon Spirit— making him one of this state’s everlasting heroes.”