



# Robert E. Wertheimer

1928 - 2007

Robert E. "Bob" Wertheimer was born in Longview, Washington, in 1928. Bob's father, Robert S. Wertheimer was the mill manager for Longview Fibre Company, and the son of company's co-founder, Monroe Wertheimer.

Longview Fibre Company was incorporated in 1926. The primary operation it was incorporated for was operation of a paper mill in Longview, Washington. Construction was completed in 1927, of a mill with offices and one machine to produce linerboard (heavy paper used in corrugated boxes). As production grew from 15,000 tons per year in 1928 to over 1,000,000 tons per year in later years, linerboard, and corrugating medium always remained a significant part of production. Raw material for the mill was Douglas-fir sawmill waste from the Long Bell Lumber Company, and in later years, from many sawmills and other species of wood. The first customer of Longview Fibre Company was General Fibre Box in Springfield, Massachusetts. As the company grew, linerboard and corrugating medium for corrugated boxes were essential products of the company. Bob was in charge of the Container Division, which produced corrugated boxes for most of his career.

When Bob was fourteen years old, his father enrolled him at Culver Military Academy, a college preparatory Boarding School in Culver, Indiana. There he developed an interest in military history, and an obsession for precision, neatness, impeccable dress, and sharp pencils. Bob returned to Longview and graduated from R.A. Long High School in Longview in 1946. Summers were filled with employment at the Longview paper mill. He worked in the bull gang, crews of young men who dug ditches, and other work that was assigned. He loved working side-by-side with other young men he knew from his years in Longview.

He attended the University of Washington, obtaining a B.S. in Mechanical Engineering in 1950, and then went to Harvard Business School for an MBA in 1952. His education was very similar to R.P. "Dick" Wollenberg's who got a B.S. in Mechanical Engineering from University of California at Berkeley and an MBA from Harvard in 1938.

After graduation, Bob began full-time employment at Longview Fibre Company. For the first three years he worked in sales at the Los Angeles (Vernon, CA) box plant, which had been built in 1949. He became the product development engineer for the LA plant in 1955, and product development remained a passion throughout his career.

In 1956, at age twenty-eight, he moved to Longview in management, and became the youngest director on

the board of directors. His duties varied, including chip buyer, technical assistant to mill management, paper machine foreman, and assistant manager of the Longview box plant. Unfortunately, the following year in 1957, Bob lost his father, Robert S. Wertheimer, who died of a heart attack on a Sunday at the mill.

In 1960, Bob was promoted to assistant manager of container sales, and moved quickly to managing container sales and production. Bob's passion for customers and product developments would drive him for the rest of his career.

In 1975, when Bill Clark retired as mill manager, Bob returned to Longview as mill manager. One condition of returning was that he live in the house on Kessler Boulevard that his father built, and the house was purchased from the owner. Bob felt confined by the production-oriented job, particularly with the daily presence of Dick Wollenberg. Bob also found the small-town environment of Longview not to his liking. It was agreed by all that he should return to San Francisco to run the Container Division.

Longview Fibre owned ten to thirteen box plants all over the country, and Bob traveled to all of them. He always made a point to visit with at least one customer as well as the regional sales and production managers, and the local management. He focused on growing sales of the container division to provide the base load that the mill needed. He was always focused on keeping the plant equipment modern and improving productivity. For example, when Bob started in the container division, printing was with oil-based inks that had to dry before boxes were folded and glued. Operations included printing and slotting, and drying, followed by folding and gluing. As flexographic water-based inks became available, the process could be accomplished in one operation. In the early 1980s, when the industry was struggling due to a decline in building construction and high raw material costs, Bob promoted what Dick Wollenberg called "ruthless modernization" of the box plants. He traveled to Lyon, France, and negotiated purchase of multiple flexo-folder-glueers, and to Switzerland to purchase platen die cutters. He negotiated substantial discounts for multiple units. Later he traveled to Germany and Japan to purchase corrugators. Most of his travel abroad was at his own expense, so he could travel as he wished, without submitting expenses.

In 1985, Dick Wollenberg appointed Bob to the position of executive vice president, a position he occupied until his retirement at the end of 2000. Bob and Dick maintained almost daily contact. Dick focused on pro-

duction at the Longview mill and the bottom line, with direction to either increase tons sold or to increase price; he left the details on how to accomplish this up to the paper sales people. His main direction to Bob was to determine how to sell more boxes to provide a load on the mill.

In the 1990s, as business, and therefore packaging required, moved to Asia, Bob focused on value-added packaging and displays. As the container business declined for several years all business was competitive, even the agricultural business that continued, mostly in the west. At the same time, the Pacific Northwest had high cost, so the business model of being a low-cost producer was not viable.

Bob purchased, with the approval of Dick Wollenberg, five color printers, and equipment to produce triple wall containers for agriculture, and litho-laminated boxes for displays. Of course, not every new piece of equipment worked as advertised, met the market niche that was intended, or was cost effective. Experimenting satisfied Bob's endless curiosity and some failures were expected. Both Bob and Dick operated under the principle that action is almost always better than inaction.

Bob always remained optimistic about the future of the box business. However, he did not hesitate to shut down or sell operations that were not successful. The Los Angeles Plant was sold in 1989, and the Rockford, Illinois, plant was shut down.

Bob had a keen interest in history. He always found time to visit war memorials or battlefields on his numerous trips and found them deeply moving.

With his large persona, Bob could fill a room. He had a reputation for being tough and demanding, but he was actually a warm, friendly man. When he was not traveling, Bob would often get on BART and go to the Oakland plant. He relished the opportunity to visit employees and find out how equipment was performing, and if there were ideas for improvements of operations or products produced.

Those who knew Bob best - children Charlie, Tom, Kit, Amy, and Betsy - say that their father was a "common uncommon man who, beneath his elegant and refined exterior, was a man who loved to watch football on Sunday with his feet up on the coffee table. He also loved to barbecue and work crossword puzzles, and he possessed a keen ability to slide from executive decorum to working shoulder-to-shoulder with his employees."

Bob now joins Robert S. Wertheimer, Harry Wollenberg, and Dick Wollenberg in the Forestry Center Leadership Hall.