

Rody Ryon Tribute

Rody Ryon is an individual endowed with the capacity to master change; to meet the challenges created in an ever changing society, and business climate, while always remaining true to the tenets of his faith, to his family, and to his work ethic. His strength of character, and dedication to hard work, has enabled him to grow and build where others have failed, creating opportunities for himself, his family and his business associates. Rody has been our mentor and friend in excess of 30 years. He worked with Hugh M. Cunningham Sr. during the 50's through early 1980's. Hugh M. Cunningham Inc. is honored to be in his circle of business friends and associates, and is pleased to share in honoring him on this occasion.

Hugh M. Cunningham, Inc.

Through The Years

Seventy- Seven years of living and six decades of work in the plumbing supply business has left Rody Ryon, one of the founders of Epic Supply in Fort Worth, knowing one thing for sure.

"I wouldn't go back and change a thing," Rody says. "I would mess it up if I went back and tried to change it. I've been with three major companies in Fort Worth, and have been president or vice-president of all of them. The Lord has actually picked me up and moved me. I never would have changed. Circumstances have come that physically made me leave each time. I'm a person that would never change." The first thing that hasn't changed about Rody is that he is a Fort Worth native. Born in 1932 as a middle child of a dairy delivery driver and a doctor's secretary, Rody lived in Fort Worth the majority of his life. His three children and nine grandchildren were also all in Fort Worth until they went to college, can boast the same.

Another thing that has stayed the same is Rody's pure enjoyment for a hard day's work. "I have basically worked most of my life," he says. "I started in this industry when I was 16, maybe 17. Even in high school, I took distributive education, where you work half a day and go to school half the day. I worked for a drugstore delivering prescriptions on a bicycle, helped my dad on his milk route, and painted tin sheds in the heat, a job my mother begged me to quit."

In 1951, Rody married his high school sweetheart, Beverly, whose father was a plumber, was actually inadvertently responsible for his career in the plumbing supply business.

"He said I could come work for him and learn the wholesale plumbing supply business. He had a good friend in the business and I was told that if I went to work there, learn a little and then I could come work for him. Of course, I did!" Then my father-in-law passed away at an early age in 1952 and there I was "stuck" in the wholesale plumbing business and have been here ever since thanks to my father in law.

For Rody, it proved to be difficult to start a marriage and a career. "The thing was, I was in the army, and had just gotten through my basic training, and was home on furlough from overseas when my father-in-law passed away," he says. "Beverly buried her father on a Saturday, and I flew back to Korea on a Sunday because the army would not give me an extension."

Circumstances improved when Rody returned in 1955 and he came back to Service Plumbing Supply. "I worked 41 hours a week there, and went to TCU at night for five nights a week," he remembers. "I graduated in 1961 with two degrees, one in accounting and one in business. In between there, we had three sons, Craig, Wes and Ross."

For 31 years, Rody worked at Service Plumbing Supply, and eventually became president of the company in 1977. He left in 1980 when the founder of the company passed away and it shifted under new management. "I went to Morrison Supply Company and became the manager of the Fort Worth branch and then vice-president. In 1988, Jahn's Supply, one of my competitors for years came up for sale and I bought it. I had a partner; CB Hall and we sold the company to Hajoca in 1998. We stayed with them until 2007. At Jahn's, I worked with my son Ross and CB's grandson, Jay Hall. We all resigned and opened Epic Supply. Ross and Jay run the company, I just tag along."

What has he learned during his six decades in the business? "Your business is nothing without the people who work for you," he says. "If you don't have good people, you have nothing."

Rody says he doesn't have a favorite decade, that he enjoyed them all, but he thinks the decade he's enjoying now just might be the best yet.

"We've had a very good life. We've been very blessed. The whole family is pretty strong in our faith. We belong to Sagamore Hill Baptist Church, which he joined in 1957. I became a deacon there in 1963, and am now a trustee and chairman of the deacon staff. That is a very big part of our life. I the only charter member left in the Breakfast East Fort Worth Optimist Club, of which I've been secretary/treasurer for 47 years. I was also president of the Wholesale Distributors Association for 2000-2001."

Despite his accomplishments, Rody insists he doesn't have any real talents to speak of. "I get up, go to work, and go home!" he says. "As I said, I just follow my son around now. He lets me have an office and free coffee. I keep up with the pricing and do some ordering." Rody says he is amazed at the technology that has developed during his lifetime and how it has affected our industry. "It has helped us build a very strong business in two years. Even though technology has changed, people haven't. People are still good."

Rody's favorite "good" people are his family, his kids, friends and employees. "We live in Southlake, but we have a home in Granbury with the boat and jet skis for the grandkids and a ranch in Dublin for the boys to go hunting on," he says. "The only reason I have them is for the kids."

"We enjoy traveling," Rody continues. "We have almost gone around the world. We've been on 13 to 14 cruises. We've been to Europe five or six times, to the Orient and Hawaii three or four times. One of our goals was to travel the states before the boys left home. We got through 46 states. We never did get the Dakotas before they left home."

He is proud of his sons and their unique personalities and gifts. Craig is "multi-talented." Wes is a "tremendous salesperson, with a good strong personality". He says, "Ross may be the most knowledgeable person in the plumbing fixture business." As for his "beautiful and talented" wife of nearly 58 years, he says he wouldn't change a thing in their life together either. "First, there's a commitment," he says. "You've got to be committed to what you told the Lord you would do. There's good times and bad times, but there is much more of the good." Does that mean Rody will never stop working? "I'll never retire," Rody insists. "I'll always work somewhere. I'll dig a ditch out in the sun!"

Rody has just caught wind that those who know and love him will be honoring his years in the business, which pleases him, even though for him personally, hitting the 60 year mark is all in another day's work.

"They're going to have a reception for me the 22nd of July, which I just found out about, he says. "But other than that, I'm not really going to celebrate. I'm just going to get up and go to work! I'm very blessed."