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LYLE HALLMAN SET A STANDARD FOR COMMUNITY PHILANTHROPY

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When Lyle Hallman died in a car accident in 2003, at age 81, he left an astonishing and complex legacy to his family, to his business colleagues, and to his Kitchener-Waterloo community. Lawyer Paul Grespan, Hallman’s real estate lawyer and friend, caught the two sides to Hallman’s energetic life when he told Exchange, “Lyle enjoyed the challenge of earning the money. Everybody saw him as tough-minded and hard-nosed, but I think he got a tremendous satisfaction out of giving to the community.”

Lyle Hallman was perhaps the quintessential K-W business person. He built his business from the ground up – and since his primary focus was always real estate, that is an unusually apt metaphor. He began in home building and renovations, and then became the most prolific builder and manager of apartment complexes in the Region.

Claude Gregg is a former executive officer of Waterloo Region Home Builders Association, and a long-time friend of Lyle Hallman. He remembers that “Lyle had many, many lean years in the early days of his real estate business. And then, he gambled everything he had when he started building apartment buildings.”

Hallman’s gamble paid off – for himself (he eventually owned and managed 4,000 apartment units), and for his community. Grespan recalls Hallman’s first big effort to give something back. “We completed Stanley Park East, from Ottawa Street south to the Chicopee area.” It was an enormous and successful development project, and, according to Grespan, Hallman decided to make a contribution to the new community he had just developed. “He gave a million dollars to the Lyle S. Hallman pool.”

Gregg adds a couple of details to the story – he says that Hallman did not seek to be in the public eye because of his generosity, but with projects starting with the pool, “they [community and organization officials] insisted.”

Grespan remembers the day Lyle Hallman Pool opened. “Lyle got a lot of satisfaction” from that project. “He got a real charge out of seeing the kids in the pool... It just snowballed from there.”

Indeed it did. The Hallman name, well known for apartment buildings and real estate developments throughout Waterloo Region, soon became even more known because of Lyle Hallman’s philanthropic contributions. Hallman saw the difference the donation to the pool made, and began to make that kind of a difference through many of the key institutions and organizations in the region – Grand River Hospital, Wilfrid Laurier and Waterloo universities, the Kitchener-Waterloo Community Foundation, to name a few.

Grespan suggests that Hallman caught a vision. “He wanted to leave a lasting legacy and show an example to other wealthy individuals.”

One person who clearly is following that example is Lyle Hallman’s son, Jim. Jim’s older brother, Peter, died in 1999, and his father Lyle, four years later, leaving Jim to lead the family enterprises – both business-related

In June 2002, Lyle endowed the Lyle S. Hallman Chair in Child and Family Welfare at Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo.
and philanthropic. (See Making a Difference in this edition of Exchange). He told Exchange that he tries to follow his father’s business principles and philanthropic commitment. He is clearly conscious of the responsibility he has inherited.

Claude Gregg says that Lyle’s philosophy demonstrated generosity based in practicality. “He believed it was better to give a man a hand up than a handout,” he says. Lyle wanted to be sure his donations would make a genuine and lasting difference, and that was reflected in the kinds of projects he supported, and in Hallman’s focus on creating charitable trusts, the kinds of donations that keep on giving. Lyle encouraged his friends and colleagues to follow that kind of model, for example, by providing seed money for a trust, and then urging others to get involved.

Gregg says, “Lyle didn’t throw money at charities. He would buy equipment like a kidney dialysis machine.” Gregg recalls being approached by a young person, a few years ago, who asked if Gregg knew Lyle Hallman. “Tell Mr. Hallman thanks for the last ten years of my life,” said the dialysis recipient. When Gregg reported this conversation to Lyle, his answer was, “Good. Then it’s working.”

A lot of stuff is working in Waterloo Region thanks to Lyle Hallman. His contributions to the community were acknowledged by the Kitchener-Waterloo Community Foundation, which presented the first Walter Bean Award in his memory, to his widow, Wendy Hallman. Wendy is also carrying on Lyle’s philanthropic vision.

Examples of organizations that have benefited from the generosity of Lyle Hallman and his family would include the Community Foundation; the University of Waterloo Library; the Lyle S. Hallman Institute for Health Promotion at U of W; Wilfrid Laurier University where he endowed the Lyle S. Hallman Chair in Child and Family Welfare; The University of Guelph, especially the Pet Trust and an animal MRI project, in which Wendy Hallman is very involved; the Grand River Hospital Foundation; the Strong Start Reading Program in Waterloo Region schools; the Waterloo Region Children’s Museum; and, of course, many others.
When Lyle Hallman died in the auto accident that also claimed the life of another valued community volunteer – Beatrice Holst, 70 of New Dundee – tributes poured in from friends and admirers. University of Waterloo president David Johnson said, “Lyle was a tremendous friend to the University of Waterloo and a joy to be with. He took great delight in helping UW and the community and will be greatly missed. But his legacy as a community builder will endure.”

Wilfrid Laurier President Bob Rosehart added, “Lyle Hallman was a unique and caring individual who wanted to help others. He showed a great interest in the development and wellbeing of his community.”

Robert L. Warren, Chair of the Grand River Hospital Foundation, said, “the foundation lost a good friend and long-time supporter in October 2003. Lyle Hallman was known throughout our community as a selfless philanthropist. Lyle was a leader of great vision and compassion. He will be truly missed.”

Lyle Hallman was a member of the Order of Canada, the recipient of an honorary doctorate from the University of Waterloo, and a man honoured with innumerable awards. He also, according to long-time friend Claude Gregg, was a prize-winning needlepoint artist. Yet another side to one of the best friends Waterloo Region ever had.