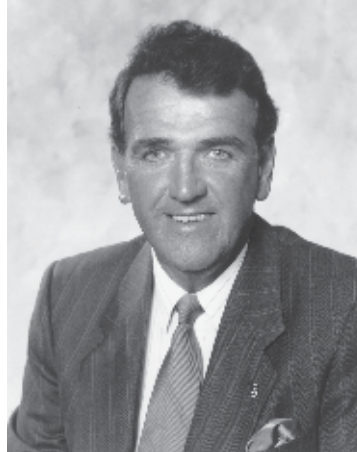


Honourary Life Members

Jack Flemming

CANS Honourary Life Member 2009



Jack Flemming grew up in a house which is now The Trail Shop on Quinpool Road in Halifax.

Flemming clearly recalls those early years and the impact they had on his latter life.

"Dad grew up in the depression. He was a stockbroker – and stayed working as one right into his 80's – but he kept me away from the Stock Market. He didn't think it was a good choice. So I got a typical type of summer job, doing inspections on roadwork. Back then, everyone got a summer job with the Department of Highways."

Those summers on the roads paid off when Flemming graduated from the Nova Scotia Technical College in 1962 and joined Municipal Spraying and Contracting.

"Most people see all the roadwork I've been involved with and figure I must be a civil engineer. I never tire of telling them I graduated as a mechanical engineer," Flemming says with a chuckle, "which I point out is one step above civil, because we can do both!"

It was at Municipal that Flemming met his career mentor, company owner F. Carl Hudson.

"We developed a very close working relationship," Flemming recalls, "almost a father/son type. I was the only engineer there for 11 years and I thought I would work there forever."

However, that's not quite how it turned out. While Flemming's career was really just getting started, Hudson's was drawing toward its close and he decided it was time to sell the company to a new owner. Flemming thought he was the right one to take over.

"Mr. Hudson wanted to sell, so I went out and raised the money to buy it. But he thought I was too young and wouldn't sell it to me. So I quit."

Flemming says it was a hard decision to make, leaving the company where he thought he would spend his career and starting his own firm, Ocean Contractors Limited. He also had a young family to think about, having married Marion shortly after graduation and four children already on the way.

"Breaking into the industry was tough. There were a lot of sleepless nights. Vacations were never on the agenda. Back then, contractors never took time off – it would be like a farmer shutting down his farm."

However, Flemming quickly points out he had a lot of help in those early days. He says there was lots of support from people and companies he knew from his days at Municipal, plus the assistance of two key individuals.

"In 1974 I met up with Jim and Fraser Conrad, two wonderful men who were instrumental in establishing our first asphalt plant off the Waverly Road."

Since then, Ocean has continued to grow and become one of the construction industry's leading firms. From an initial staff of two with just a single truck, the company has grown to employ more than 300 people with year-round operations. Today the company specializes in asphalt, concrete and foundations, but also has divisions that concentrate on small jobs and snow removal in the winter.

Although it's a key part of the business today, it wasn't until the 1980's that Ocean first turned its attention to the ready mixed concrete business. Since then the company has become one of the top ready mix producers in Halifax Regional Municipality.

This willingness to try new things and be successful at them is one of the main things to which Flemming attributes the company's long-term success. For example, the company currently reclaims used roofing shingles as a feedstock for its asphalt plant and recycles old asphalt.

A separate division has ventured into the furniture moving business with the purchase of both Thompson Moving and Storage and Maritime Moving and Storage. The new operations may be in a completely different field, but there are several synergies with the contracting side, especially in terms of fleet management, tires, fuel and maintenance.

All these changes don't stop at the shop floor. Flemming says one of the biggest changes can be seen in how the company is managed and how it treats its employees.

"The company promotes strong family ties," Flemming says, "because it makes our people stronger. We have third generation families with us now, and we're really proud of that. There's a lot of satisfaction to be had from employing many people and being responsible for their well being."

This care for others spills over into all aspects of Flemming's life. He is widely recognized for his philanthropic activities, having been the recipient of numerous community and professional awards. In 2001, he received an honorary Doctorate in Science from St. Mary's University, which he followed up in 2002 with the Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the Year Award. In 2003 he was awarded the prestigious Order of Canada.

Flemming has received the DalTech Alumni Achievement Award for outstanding contribution to the community and profession, and was similarly recognized by Mount Saint Vincent University with its Anniversary Award for exceptional volunteer contribution. In 2006, Dalhousie also recognized him with an Honorary Doctorate in Engineering.

Professionally he has received the Association of Professional Engineers Gold Award, which recognizes exceptional achievement in the practice of professional engineering. He is also an honorary life member of the Canadian Construction Association (CCA); past-president of the CCA, Nova Scotia Road Builders Association, the Construction Association of Nova Scotia (CANS) and the Association of Professional Engineers of Nova Scotia; and has served as a member of the Board of Governors for Mount Saint Vincent University, DalTech, Dalhousie University, the IWK Health Center and Maritime Medical Care.

Flemming has been involved with various charities over the years, including Halifax YMCA, Bonny Lea Farm, Phoenix House, Adsum House, the Shad Valley Program and the Sisters of Charity. He even founded the Flemming Charitable Foundation, which has become a family-wide activity since it was started 10 years ago.

"It's a method of giving back to the community that has blessed us with such great support all these years," Flemming says.

Flemming also sought to give back to the construction industry during his career. His involvement with several industry associations was always at the highest levels, providing leadership and direction on such issues as training,

apprenticeship and prequalification. Flemming says many of these issues continue to be of concern to the industry.

"The risks faced by this industry today are much higher than they used to be," he says. "Construction still has a big impact on our province and on the economy, but there's a high degree of fragmentation of the industry and we need to get back to some sense of stability – where price isn't the only factor and where prequalification is needed before you can bid on jobs."

The many connections and relationships built by being involved in groups such as CANS is one of the best ways Flemming knows to battle such issues.

"I always put a lot of strength on knowing the people in the industry and the best way to do that is through your associations. I still get calls today from people I met during those years."