

John Jodrey dedicated his life to the family empire

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Special to The Globe and Mail

Published March 19, 2012 Updated March 26, 2017



John J. Jodrey

The head of one of Nova Scotia's wealthiest and most powerful families, John Jodrey, oversaw the investment holding company in a business empire that included a diverse range of companies from paper, pulp and recycling to paper plates, medical devices and construction materials.

Incorporated in 1945, in Hantsport, N.S., a picturesque town in the province's Annapolis Valley, Jodrey took over the empire his father, Roy, had created and went on to serve as president of chair of Scotia Investments for almost 60 years.

Scotia Investments, which Nova Scotia's Premier Darrell Dexter described as one of the province's "most important innovators," includes Maritime Paper Products and Minas Basin Pulp and Power Co. The Jodrey family also grew to hold a controlling interest in Lunenburg food processing giant High Liner Foods Inc. and large stakes in a number of publicly traded companies. In recent years, the business empire was quietly divided up among family members. Jodrey wasn't happy to see this happen.

"John was his father's son," said David Hennigar, Jodrey's nephew and chairman and CEO of Thornridge Holdings. "John was proud of the Jodrey name."

Jodrey, who died on Feb. 19 in Chester, N.S., at the age of 98, lived most of his adult life in Hantsport, in a modest, well-kept corner home, down the street from the headquarters of the family's business holdings.

Despite the family making Canadian Business magazine's annual list of the 100 wealthiest in the country last year – with a reported net worth of \$600-million – Jodrey lived a quiet, private life. "He lived a modest life – no extravagances," said his son, Bruce.

Extremely dedicated to the family business, Jodrey didn't have many hobbies and probably would have worked until the very end if his hearing hadn't betrayed him. "He always had his finger in things," says Hennigar, who up until a few years ago would talk to his uncle daily about business matters.

Born on Sept. 18, 1913, in Gaspereau, N.S., he was the son of Lena Isabel and Roy Jodrey, pioneering entrepreneurs in the province. After graduating from Wolfville High School and Horton Academy, he owned and operated a service station in Pictou for two years, followed by an apple orchard operation. While still in his 20s, he joined the family business of Minas Basin, and then Canadian Keyes Fibre Inc. (renamed CKF Inc. in 1982), eventually becoming president and chairman of both companies.

"CKF was probably his pride and joy," said Bruce, who later became the company's chairman and CEO. "It was his baby. He took it over when it was new and steered it forward."

Started in 1933 by Roy Jodrey to manufacture pie plates from the pulp fibre produced by its sister company, Minas Basin, its Royal Chinet line of paper plates claims to be Canada's largest selling premium brand. "He was a builder," Hennigar says.

Wayne Folker, the mayor of Hantsport, worked for the Jodrey family for 49 years, following in his father's footsteps, like countless families in the area. In a town of 1,200, more than 400 people work for one of the Jodrey's many companies, says Folker. "I've always been fond of the saying what's good for the mills is good for the town, and what's good for the town is good for the mills."

As a young man, Folker remembers working on one of the machines in the CKF plant, and being both nervous and surprised the first time Jodrey came in through the plant's side door after midnight to talk to him. "He wasn't out to check on you but to see how things were going," he said. "He was very hands on. He was a 24-7 type of person."

While Jodrey was a quiet man, he wasn't shy about asking questions and his employees quickly learned that if you didn't know the answer you had better find out because the next time he saw you he wouldn't forget that he had asked.

Deeply rooted in Hantsport, Jodrey shopped in town and was often spotted walking his dog. He took his civic duties seriously. Despite a blinding snowstorm one New Year's Day, he made sure to make an appearance at the town hall levee. "I just came in today to say hello," he told Folker.

In 1948, Jodrey and a group of local businessmen started the Hantsport Memorial Community Centre, which includes a museum, sitting on just more than 7 hectares of land. Jodrey served as its president for almost a decade. Scotia Investments still holds its annual picnic at the centre.

Jodrey's philanthropic efforts touched many areas, not only in Hantsport, but across Nova Scotia. An effective fundraiser, he told Bruce that he once made a pitch for funds and the donor asked, "How much would you like?" He mentioned a figure and thought afterward, "Maybe I should have asked for more"

A strong supporter of several universities in Nova Scotia, he created scholarships and served on the board of Acadia University, where he helped establish the Jodrey School of Computer Science and the Roy and Isabel Jodrey student residence. At Mount Saint Vincent University, he helped establish the Lena Isabel Jodrey Chair in Gerontology and served as chancellor of the Technical University of Nova Scotia for many years.

He also supported several Nova Scotian hospitals and their foundations, including Halifax's QEII Foundation. For many years he also served as a director of Algoma Central Corp., the Bank of Nova Scotia, Crown Life Insurance and Extendicare.

Outside of work, he loved riding in his speed boat near Chester and opening the motor to full throttle. He also liked to tend the roses in his garden and often gave flowers to family members or brought some to his office, and grumbled when they were neglected. A fondness for dancing led him at one point to quietly have a dance floor built in one of his homes.

"He lived by the old rules in his business and in his private life," said Bruce. "His word was his bond."

Jodrey, who was named to the Order of Canada in 1999, leaves his wife, Maxine, son Bruce, daughter Kathryn, daughter-in-law Johanna; six grandchildren and 10 great-grandchildren. He was predeceased by his son, Thomas.

Source: Globe and Mail <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/john-jodrey-dedicated-his-life-to-the-family-empire/article534766/>