

Biographical Portrait

JOHN C. HAMPTON

1926–2006

Fortunately for the forest products industry and the Pacific Northwest, John Hampton decided to stop by his father's Portland, Oregon, office in 1947 on his way to Tacoma, Washington, to look for a job. That's when L. M. "Bud" Hampton suggested to his son that while he contemplated occupations he might as well work at the family sawmill.

From that proposal emerged the innovation and leadership to help grow the family's forest products company, Hampton Affiliates, into the largest lumber manufacturer in Oregon, and provided the industry with what some have called the "foremost spokesman for managed use of forest resources" in the last half of the century.

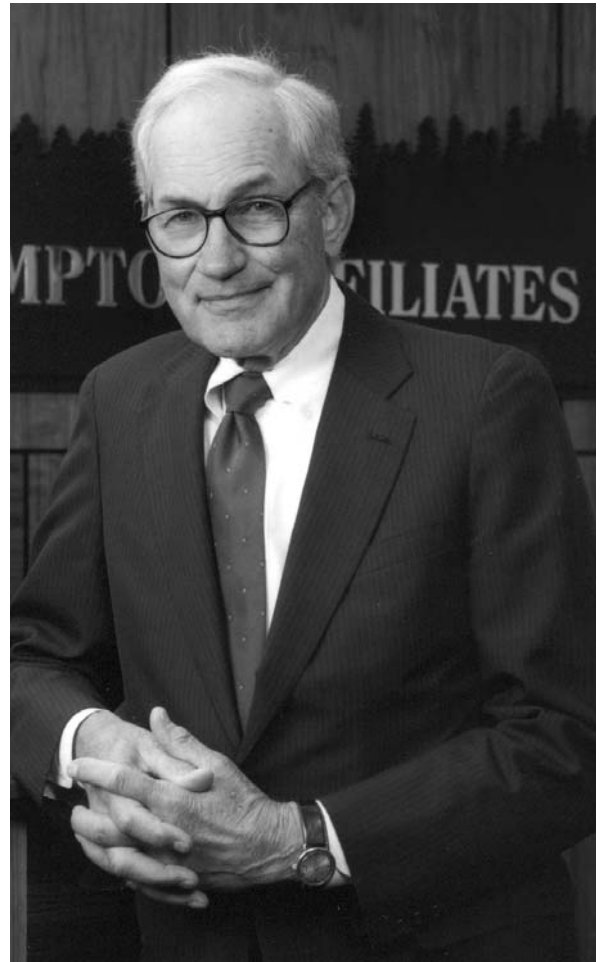
John Hampton was born in Tacoma in 1926, where his father Bud owned a retail lumber company. Although John studied economics at the University of Washington, he spent most of his college years training for the Navy in the U.S. Naval Reserve Officer Training Program. After graduation in 1947, with the war over, he signed on as a liberty ship seaman and traveled to Japan. It was on his return that he took his father up on his suggestion.

During World War II's lumber shortage, Bud bought a sawmill in Willamina, Oregon, along with 11,000 acres of nearby timber to provide his own direct log supply. John worked the night shift at the Willamina sawmill until 1949. He then spent a year at a Portland wholesale firm before his father asked him to start a wholesale lumber company, Hampton Lumber Sales. That same year, John married his college sweetheart, Carol. The Hamptons raised four children, two sons and two daughters. Sons David and Jamey work for the company as well, representing the third generation of this family-owned business.

John continued to run the Portland wholesale business until the mid-1950s.

With the purchase of a veneer mill in California and a sawmill in Canada, Bud was spending more time away from the office, leaving John to make the operational decisions at the sawmill with the plant manager. John continued to help run the business and was named CEO of Willamina Lumber Co. and its affiliates when Bud retired in 1970. By 1999, Hampton Affiliates included Hampton Resources, Inc., Hampton Lumber Sales Co., Hampton Tree Farms, Inc., and Hampton Lumber Mills, Inc., with a total of more than 1,000 employees.

John's success seemed to come from his deep commitment to both human and natural resources. His ability to forge creative solutions and build coalitions, his power to motivate, and his pledge to action paved his chosen path. These qualities were obvious in the late 1960s when he confronted the issue that actually began "his transformation from small-time sawmill operator to industry figurehead." Hampton Resources built its business on a small volume of private timber which it supplemented with federal timber. In 1968, log exports from federal lands were increasing at what John felt was an "alarming rate," a rate that threatened the continuance and growth of his company. He "got involved," worked with other industry members through trade organizations and successfully helped bring about limitations on federal land log exports west of the 100th meridian. It was



John Hampton's contributions extended beyond the wood products industry to community activities and causes. He held a great deal of influence in both arenas.

his first taste of what a coalition could do, an "eye opener," he recalled later: "I hadn't been involved in trade associations and didn't understand the value of what we could do together instead of acting individually."

John stayed involved. His tireless fight for a "predictable and reasonable public timber supply to sustain his industry and rural communities" by seeking constructive solutions made him a respected and

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revered spokesman for the industry. He was the industry's representative to President Clinton's Oregon Forestry Summit held in Portland in 1993.

Further recognition of his influential leadership by the industry included instrumental positions: director and past president, Western Wood Products Association; director and chair, executive board, World Forestry Center; director, American Forest & Paper Association; director and vice chair, National Forest Products Association; past chairman, Northwest Forest Resource Council; and nine years on the Oregon State Board of Forestry.

Such high profile positions also helped John communicate the industry's side of the public timber supply debate to the rest of the populace, something that he saw as imperative if there was to be a balance between environmental concerns and economic and human considerations. He believed that educating the public about Oregon's and Washington's Forest Practices Acts, and the difficult job of state and private timberlands management would help change public opinion. Congress would respond to public opinion and the laws restricting public timber access were bound to change if the public understood that modern forest management was environmentally friendly, he argued.

Part of the charge that fueled John into these industry causes was his roots as an independent sawmiller and his total, constant consideration for employees. Because Hampton Affiliates is an independent company, it has had to do more with less. Without a large timber base, the company must stay on the cutting edge of technology and management techniques. "Our employees must be better motivated, educated, and trained," John contended. He urged employees to learn about the latest technological advancements and evaluate them. He was proud that most suggestions for improvement came from the "bottom up" instead of being completely management directed.

Hampton's willingness to embrace technology and his employees' sophistication and knowledge helped to achieve effective productivity. As of 2006, five sawmill complexes were operating with state-of-the-art technology to produce more than 1.4 billion board feet of lumber a year, which made Hampton Affiliates the largest lumber manufacturer in Oregon.

He invested more than \$10 million in the mill at the Willamina facility in the winter of 2005–06, installing a computerized planer that could produce 3,200 linear feet of lumber per minute. Hampton Affiliates anticipated total sales of more than \$1 billion in 2006. In that same period, Hampton Lumber Sales, one of the nation's largest wholesalers, marketed some 1.5 billion board feet to both domestic and overseas markets. One subsidiary distributes windows and doors and another, specializing in lumber, plywood, and engineered wood products, contributed with sales in Washington, Oregon, and California.

A notable area of focus for Hampton Affiliates is its forest practices. To supply its mills, Hampton Affiliates holds 167,000 acres of timberland in the Northwest. Hampton Affiliates participates in the Sustainable Forestry Initiative. Some 400 to 700 trees are planted on each acre harvested, with a total of 2.5 million seedlings planted in a typical winter. Hampton foresters work to facilitate wildlife, water, and recreation, and complete several stream enhancement projects each year. John Hampton continued his quest on educating about forests and forestry even after his retirement as CEO of the Hampton companies in 1995. He remained Hampton Affiliates' chairman of the board of directors, and was heavily involved in the World Forestry Center until his death on March 15, 2006. In an interview conducted a month before he died, he expressed regret that he had not done even more to educate Oregonians about their forests. Hampton was "convinced his fellow citizens know 'next to nothing' about their trees. 'Fully 60 percent of the trees in Oregon belong to the people,' he [said], 'mismanaged on their behalf by the government.' Wilderness is fine...but Oregon has 'plenty.' Forests are a resource and should be managed for more than recreation. 'The timber industry has failed miserably in its efforts to educate the public. We need to tell our story.'"¹

John Hampton's contributions have not been solely to the wood products industry. He and his wife Carol have been vital supporters of community activities and causes. He never lost a chance to educate audiences on how arts can drive the Oregon economy: "Only arts and culture, he insisted, will draw to Oregon, and keep here, the people we need: 'People who

create new payrolls, new products, new prosperity.'"² In the early 1980s, he took an idea to provide long-term funding for Portland's three major art institutions (opera, art museum, and symphony) and spearheaded what is now the Oregon Arts Heritage Endowment Fund. He leveraged his contributions—monetary and non-monetary—to bring the fund to its potential. It is managed and administered by the Oregon Community Foundation with equal funding to each organization. In 1999, John became chairman of the Oregon Community Foundation, which aggressively promoted and encouraged philanthropy throughout the state. John served in other key positions: senior director on the Oregon Business Council; director for nine years at the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco; director for 13 years of PacifiCorp; and chair of the St. Vincent Hospital and Medical Center Advisory Board.

The honors were many and varied. When John Hampton received the 1990 Aubrey R. Watzek Award, it was presented by his good friend Harry Merlo, then Chairman and President of Louisiana Pacific Corporation. In his presentation remarks, Merlo summed up the lifework of John Hampton this way: "Over the past 40 years John has become recognized as a selfless contributor of his energy and his resources, giving over and over again to improve the quality of life in our beautiful Pacific Northwest.... Whether it be the rural mill town of Willamina or the City of Portland, the way John Hampton looks after his community truly personifies the 'Oregon Spirit'—making him one of this state's everlasting heroes." □

This article is an adaptation of the biographical entry on John C. Hampton in the Memorial Gallery of the World Forestry Center's Discovery Museum in Portland, Oregon. We are grateful for their permission and cooperation in preparing this article.

NOTES

1. Jonathan Nicholas, "John Hampton: A Towering Spirit in Timber and the Arts, A Specialist in Getting Others to Give Money," OregonianLive.com, February 13, 2006, accessed on May 23, 2007.
2. Ibid.