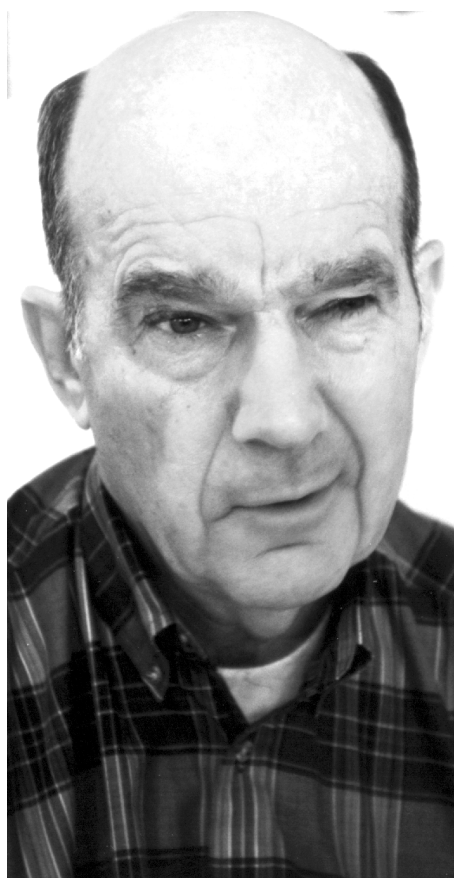


"Innovative, Tough

By John Davis and Dwight Walker

"I wasn't afraid to fail," says Thompson. "I failed over and over again. Yet, it seems no one, including me, remembers my failures. Somehow the failures get overlooked. People just remember the successes."



"Innovative, tough and generous..."
That's how Bob Thompson's colleagues and friends describe him.

In July 1999 Thompson sold his company—Thompson-McCully—for \$422 million. That's a good price for an asphalt paving company, but it's not the main point of the story. The point of the story is his generosity. He shared \$128 million of his profits with his employees, making more than 90 of them millionaires.

The future of his employees was at the forefront of Thompson's mind when he decided to sell his company to CRH in Dublin, Ireland. "It was important to us that the people who helped build the company share in our success," says Thompson.

Thompson has not only shared his success with his employees, but over the years with the asphalt industry as well, says Owen McCormick of hot mix producer Joseph P. McCormick Construction Company. "He is always looking for ways to improve the business and the product we deliver— asphalt," says McCormick. "He is a credit to our industry and his commitment to excellence has made us all better."

Farm Boy to Chip-Sealer

Bob Thompson evolved from a farm boy in Janesville, Michigan, to the head of one of the largest asphalt production and paving companies in the state. After graduating from Bowling Green University in Ohio and flying for the U.S. Air Force during the Korean War, Thompson took \$3,500 of his family's savings and bought an asphalt distributor and a chip-seal spreader. He went into business with his uncle, Wilfred McCully. His first job was a street resurfacing project in Battle

Creek, Michigan. Bob says he made \$17,000 during his first year of operation. Since then, his company has always made a profit.

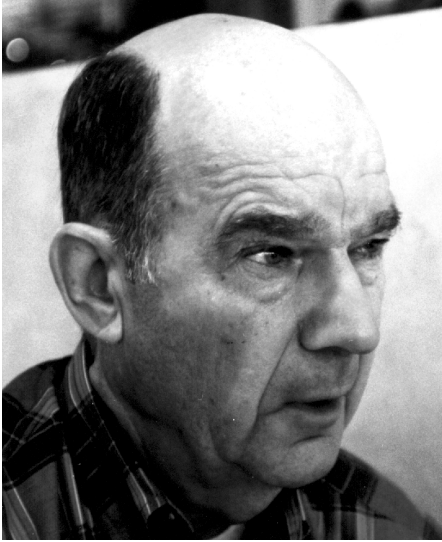
"I wasn't afraid to fail," says Thompson. "I failed over and over again. Yet, it seems no one, including me, remembers my failures. Somehow the failures get overlooked. People just remember the successes." From his successes and mistakes, Thompson developed the basic principles that form the foundation of his company's success. They include:

- ▲ Actively participating in the associations and organizations that support your company's core business.
- ▲ Encouraging and supporting employee education, including studies that may not have a direct connection to hot mix production and paving.
- ▲ A willingness to experiment with new approaches, new technologies and new directions.
- ▲ A continuing commitment to producing quality products that serve the customer's needs.
- ▲ Directing growth to support the development of the company—not just to increase volume.
- ▲ Planning and restructuring the company to meet changing conditions.

Team Leader

Bob Thompson has always actively participated in the asphalt industry's major associations. He was a driving force behind the Asphalt Institute and NAPA moving closer together in their efforts to counter adverse environmen-

and Generous . . . "



tal regulations. He was at the forefront of leading teams of industry representatives to Washington, DC, to comment on proposed regulations that would impact the asphalt industry. Bob led the fight against the crumb rubber mandate provisions of ISTEA, which would have forced contractors to use crumb rubber in their asphalt mix.

He was the creative thinker behind the Engineering Controls for asphalt pavers. It was through his personal efforts that the first control concept was developed. His ability to work across institutional barriers was instrumental in bringing the industry, government and labor to an agreement that eventually led to controls being added to all new pavers. The result was a significantly improved working environment for paver operators.

"The industry really worked together on the paver engineering controls issue," says Thompson. A lot of people told us that the controls wouldn't work, but we believed they would and we kept working on them until they were in place."

"Same with the concrete initiative," he says. (The Portland Cement Concrete industry plans a major sales initiative to increase their market

share.) "I think we have the product and the technology to meet the concrete folks head on. If the asphalt industry will do what we know we can do, we will produce roads of excellent quality and high durability. The concrete people will be worried about the 'asphalt initiative' instead of us being worried about them."

Hot Mix Industry Champion

Byron Lord, Acting Director of Pavement Technology for the FHWA, says Thompson's actions reflect his beliefs. "He is willing to work for what he believes and invest his time and resources in reaching his goals," says Lord. "He is an outstanding leader and visionary. He is straightforward and direct. He is not afraid to stand up for what he believes is right. He is willing to take risks where he sees opportunity. He is a champion for the hot mix industry."

Thompson has always been a leader in creating awareness of quality in hot mix producers. He has missed very few chances to help raise the industry standard. If he sees something that needs to be fixed, he'll start doing something to get it fixed. If he sees an opportunity for improvement, he is right there with an idea to bring about the improvement.

Thompson is always open to new ideas and new ways to implement them, says A.J. Ronyak, a Thompson-McCully employee. "He's not afraid to spend money on research and development to make a better road or to make the industry a better and more efficient workplace. If somebody presents an idea, Bob listens with open ears. He is very much a leader in innovation.

Besides sincere concern for his employees, Thompson is a shrewd businessman. State officials call him one of the most influential men in the road industry. "You can't travel to any part of the state without driving on roads made better by Bob Thompson," says Gary Naeyaert, Communications Director of the Michigan DOT. "Some of the most influential, efficient people get that way without a lot of fanfare. That's Bob. He leads by example."

John Davis is Editor of Asphalt Magazine. Dwight Walker is Associate Director of Research and Technical Services for the Asphalt Institute. Story material for this article also came from Nancy Crawford, Asphalt Contractor, and Sheri Hall of The Detroit News.▲

