

Spotlight On

Virgil Doran: At 85 He

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"Heck, I'm too old to retire; I don't have time. I tell people, 'Sure, I like to fish, but I just don't have the time.'"

Seated in his office, 85-year-old Virgil (Virg) Doran describes his life: his work, family, politics and philosophies.

Stoutly built and as strong as a bull, Doran works like a horse every day, plays poker two nights a week and likes to fish for bluegill when he has time.

For 40 years, he sorted letters on a railroad mail train, then retired and founded Warsaw Black Oxide, Inc., Burket, with his son, Byron Cary (Cork) Doran.

"Presidential" Duties

Now president of the lucrative Burket company, Doran works a regular eight-hour-a-day week and includes truck driving in his "presidential" duties.

Having reared five children and put each of them through college, Doran is a busy, youthful soul and a most colorful personality.

Though he's financially successful, he's not a snob. He's "one of the guys."

A sociable character, Doran likes to swap good jokes.

And when he talks, he doesn't beat around the bush. He's candid, but jolly, mixing his own brand of tongue-in-cheek humor with opinion. He conjures interesting stories and delightful conversation.

Born in Burket in 1890, Doran was one of seven children of Cary and Jeanette Doran, who owned a hardware store in the town.

Mail Train

and landed a job on the railroad mail service in 1912. The postal position was desirable during the tough times of the early 19-teens, and Doran's post was something many a young man "would grab at". The pay was \$83 per month.

On the train, in the mail car, there was a letter case with approximately 150 pigeon holes, each representing a different area or state. Mail service employees stood in front of the case and placed letters in the correct pigeon holes.

Later, the letters in each nest were re-sorted and separated into more specific locations.

Usually there were four or five mail cars per train. And employees in each car were allotted approximately five mail bags per work-day for sorting. Each bag was filled with 6,000 letters.

Up 600 Per Cent

Christmastime was a headache for the mail sorters because they were smothered with pouches of Christmas cards. During the holidays, the number of mail bags per car increased from five to 300, causing postal employees to work day and night, sorting, sorting, sorting.

Doran remembers Christmas season on the mail train well.

"A lot of times, (i.e. during Decembers) I worked six days without even going to bed. I remember, there were 300 bags of Christmas cards: little narrow ones, big wide ones," Doran pauses as "season's greetings" memories swim through his head.

"And Dad has never sent a Christmas card to this day," adds Cork.

later 19-teens), Doran worked on a mail train that puffed between Pittsburgh and Chicago. He not only sorted letters, but managed a crew of 19 other mail workers who shuffled cards and envelopes going to various states.

Sears Familiar

It took five men to sort missives destined for Chicago alone, Doran recalls. And Sears and Roebuck Company was a familiar name among the scores of addressees.

"On Mondays, we'd get one pouch of letters just for Sears and Roebuck Company," recalls Doran who estimates there were 5,000 to 6,000 letters per mail pouch.

Sorting mail by hand required a good memory. Not only did a mail sorter have to remember where every post office was located on his route, but he also had to know, by a quick glance at the address, what the shortest route was to send it.

Doran reputedly knows the locations of practically every little town in the United States that has a post office. And he estimates there were 4,000 distribution centers for letters in Chicago alone.

"Automatic"

"I had the post offices so well drilled into me, it was just automatic to sort letters. I didn't have to think at all," says Doran. In winter, the mail cars were cold.

"There was heat in the cars, but the pipes would freeze," described Doran.

"And, we'd make coffee in a wash bowl and turn steam on it to heat it. The way we'd tell if it was hot enough was we'd drop a mail lock (similar to a padlock) in the



After graduating from Burket High School, Doran took a postal service exam.

On Dec. 24, 1914, Doran was united in marriage to Blanche Eherenman. The couple moved to Fort Wayne, then returned to Kosciusko County three years later, living in Warsaw. They then moved back to the Burket area, where they owned a small farm and dairy business and Doran continued to work for the postal service.

During the first 17 years of their marriage, the Dorans' family grew. Four sons and one daughter were born to them including Virgil Keith, in 1916; Delta Dean (Doran) Schutz, in 1918; Jordan Hal, in 1921; Cork, in 1928; and Marshall Brooke, in 1931.

Three of the sons are now partners in Warsaw Black Oxide company, including Virgil, Cork and Brooke, who was a Democrat candidate for County Councilman during the November, 1974, elections.

Mrs. Schutz lives in North Manchester and Hal is a cardiologist in Indianapolis.

Doran is also the grandfather of 12 and the great-grandfather of five children.

Since his three sons, Virgil, Brooke and Cork, are well-known county personalities in their own rights, and since the Dorans are noted for their vivacity, it is interesting to know the father's "family philosophy."

Family Philosophy

"My wife and I believed we would have fulfilled our social obligation if we gave all our children a college education," explains Doran who says, for years, the couple's prime objective was to pay their sons' and daughter's university expenses.

"We believed education was a good foundation on which our children could build their lives.

"We had to scratch a little to give them their educations," he says, "but they're paying me back now for the scratching we did."

Another idea that Doran consciously intended to impress on his children is that "everybody should have a good job and



Businessman With Color - sociable character, Doran humor with opinion. "Sure 'Why? Well look back thru Hoover, Eisenhower, Nixon. with that bunch?" He laughs

keep busy."

"We've always been a close family, and we worked hard together and played hard together," says Doran who proudly remembers Cork's outstanding Burket high school basketball record of 1945 and 1946 when he was the high-point man of Kosciusko County.

Democrat

Born and reared a Democrat, Doran is a rarity in Kosciusko County where most voters register under the elephant emblem, particularly the local entrepreneurs.

"I'm a Democrat because I like their liberalism," declares Doran. "The Democrat Party is a people's party. Roosevelt (Franklin D. Roosevelt), a Democrat, started Social Security...if they ever stopped Social Security all the grocery stores would close down; it's that important."

Asked why so many citizens here are members of the Republican Party, Doran speculates that, historically, the county has been a Republican pocket and persons have "inherited" the conservative philosophy from generation to generation.

The same year Doran retired from the railroad mail service, he and Cork founded Warsaw Black Oxide, Inc. in 1952.

Filled with bath vats of steaming acid



Father And Sons — Posing in the family firm, (left to right) Byron (Cork); Keith; Brooke; and Virgil Doran have made Warsaw Black Oxide, Inc., Burket, the lucrative business it is today.

Shares Secret Of Vitality

electro-polish, which is the finish used on kitchen sink strainers.

The cheapest raw metal used for coating in the Dorans' factory is zinc, at 55 cents per pound. The most expensive raw metal is cadmium, which costs \$4.25 per pound, Doran says.

One of the largest machines in the factory is a "rack and barrel" contraption which consists of approximately 36 metal barrels arranged in an oval formation and supported by a metal frame. Hanging from the metal frame, the barrels turn and hover over vats of various chemicals and baths.

Zinc Plate Process

In zinc plating, a load of screws is shoveled into the hole barrel of the rack and barrel machine. The first barrel twirls in a soap bath and the detergent seeps through the holes and washes the screws. Then the second barrel dips the screws into an "anodic clean" bath. The third barrel dunks the items into rinse water. As the screws ride in the barrels through the plating process, they are dumped in acid; then in a rinse; then a "descaler"; a rinse; a plating solution; a rinse; a clear chromate (brightener); a rinse; and in a hot dip. Finally, still in a metal barrel with holes, the newly plated screws are dried with hot air and then baked in an oven for four hours at 400 degrees Fahrenheit to remove any hydrogen embrittlement.

Though there are other plating industries in Indiana, the Dorans' company is reputedly superior in producing brightened products. The factory is equipped to "mass finish" all items 42 inches long and 18 inches wide, or smaller.

complain that more regulation is needed.

Hen House Beginning

The beginning of Warsaw Black Oxide was a hen house near Warsaw, where a few men were plating metal articles until a fire destroyed the place.

After their hen house burned, the men moved the plating company to a one-room workshop in Burket, where the present industry is located.

Approximately 23 years ago, Doran and Cork purchased the one-room shop from the original plating workers, Joe Lear and "Red" McClain. Previous to buying the industry, Cork had worked in Detroit, managing a Western Auto Store.

During the first six months, only Doran and his son worked in the factory.

Reminiscing about the first one-half year of ownership, Cork relates an anecdote:

"Once Dad and I worked day and night for six weeks. Then, all of a sudden, one night, Dad looked up from his work and he said, 'Cork, how long has it been since we've been fishing?' And we both just left the shop and went fishing."

Doran and Cork laugh.

"Yes," agrees Doran. "There were times when we worked all night, except we'd stop to watch 'I Love Lucy' on television, and then go back and work until 3 a.m."

Keith Joins Company

Later in the first year, they hired one or two men, and, in 1955, Keith joined the firm.

Formerly a plating engineer for the Arnolt Corporation, Warsaw, Keith encouraged his father and brother to enlarge the company.

when Keith came into the company, we bought \$150,000 worth of machines to expand. But the machines paid for themselves," admits the father.

In 1956 Brooke joined the corporation, which has grown so greatly, it is difficult to imagine the original one-room shop.

Dubbing himself "president and chief truck driver", Doran recalls an incident that occurred while he was driving a truck during a normal work day.

While Doran was driving out of a parking lot, he unknowingly nicked a lady's auto, which she had reportedly parked crooked.

Spotting Doran driving away, the woman chased him down and informed him he'd bumped her car.

Who's An 'Old Codger'?

"Why's an old codger like you driving a truck for this company anyway?" the woman rudely inquired, to which Doran replied, "Well, I own the place."

Besides possessing a remarkable ability to judge or estimate distance and volume at a glance, Doran is a wizard for working algebra problems in his head. He quips that he knows algebra because when he was in school the teachers hit students with a board if they didn't learn.

After Blanche Doran died in the early 1960's, Doran married his childhood sweetheart, Hazel Ruth, whose father published the weekly newspaper, "The Claypool Journal."

Having been born in an age when horse and buggies were the common mode of transportation, and now living in a time when rockets soar toward other planets, Doran appears to be ageless.

At 85 years old, president of a lucrative company that he and Cork founded during his retirement years, if he isn't working he's playing cards or fishing at Caldwell and Palestine lakes.

included in the plant is a control center where chemical pollutants are treated with chlorine gas, though some area residents

what's the secret of his vivacity? "Activity is valuable," answers Doran. "People die quick when they sit down."

he wanted to do things on a big scale," says Doran, as he analyzes his oldest son. "So,

ially successful and a jolly tongue-in-cheek Democrat," he says. Republicans' history: you want to get tied up

plating tanks of metallic chemicals, Dorans' factory is designed to put rusting finishes on metal articles of description.

st-year, the Dorans coated \$1.5 million worth of items for industries including White Screen Company and Sun Metal Products, both of Warsaw.

rently the most profitable project for Dorans' industry is zinc plating wire wheels for go-carts, doll buggies and car mobile contraptions, Doran says.

Phone Plating

er items that are coated include screws for preventing pollution in cars; mowers; slide screen ends; grocery sign clips; kitchen strainers; and valves. The company also coated every illic coin slot that was ever fastened on a pay telephone in the United States. However, the silver colored coin slots have discontinued.

proximately 30 employees work in the industry, which is housed in a long, angular building in the middle of et.

ide Warsaw Black Oxide metal finishes are coated with one of six types of rust finishes including zinc, phosphate, am, black oxide, anodization and

"President And Chief Truck Driver" — Though he's 85 years old, Doran works eight hours a day and includes truck driving in his

duties. When asked why he keeps so busy, Doran simply replies: "People die quick when they sit down."

