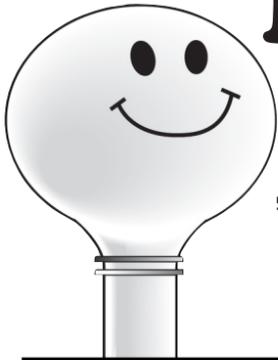


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The purpose of this paper is to be beneficial to the community it serves in every way possible.

Lappo Lumber: A source of community pride for over 45 years



ABOVE: Logs, lumber and the sawmill in the early days of Lappo Lumber. **LEFT:** Lappo in its heyday.

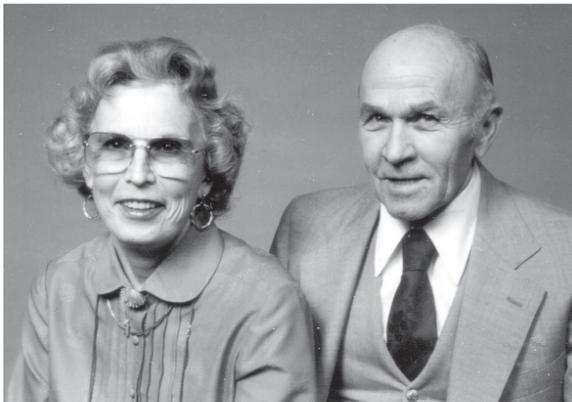


Be sure to check out the **FAN Bank** on page 15 for thousands of dollars in savings to 57 local businesses.

By Pam Mettler and Mary Weimer

"Lappo Lumber Company was built on a handshake. It was the biggest independently-owned yard in Michigan," recalls Clara Jane Middlecamp, a.k.a. "CJ," second-generation family member and daughter of former founder and president, Mitch Lappo.

She remembers Mitch Lappo in his heyday as a person who was full of "words of wisdom" and original sayings that helped build Lappo Lumber from the ground floor up while generating trust in the community. One of CJ's favorite "Mitch-isms" was hearing her dad say, "The harder I work, the luckier I get."



Mitch and Clara Lappo

Mitch, known fondly as "the bald eagle," was known for walking through the lumber yard and, upon seeing employees casually talking to one another, Mitch would ask the staff if they were "punched in" yet. He was also known for his generosity to his employees.

Third-generation family member, Seth Middlecamp, now 51, recalls that when he was 11 years old he first started working at the lumberyard. "My family would come up for the summer to visit my grandparents. Grandpa put me to work sweeping

floors and picking up the metal bands from around the lumber piles. I had to write everything I did down on a little note pad to keep track of my hours. I made 75 cents an hour."

To many who know the Lappo Lumber family, news of the family's desire to sell two former Lappo Lumber Company business sites in Fruitport and South Haven comes with a sense of sadness during this tough Michigan economic downturn.

"Our family moved to Fruitport back in 1948, but before that we bought the timber rights to our property here in the village," recalls CJ.

Then known as Clara Jane Lappo, she and her mother set up a temporary campground in 1948 and cooked for the workers who lived in tents to work the new lumber business that bore the family name. "I can remember back in those days we made rice and tomatoes as the standard meal that we cooked because we didn't have a lot of money."

Besides starting the fledgling lumber company, Mitch Lappo was also involved in the fuel oil business. And both CJ and Seth remember Mitch as doing a lot of good for people.

Mitch would travel to Michigan's Upper Peninsula to cut down timber. The timber would be brought back to the lumber company sawmill where it would be prepared for eventual sale.

At that time, horses were used to move the logs from place to place. One of CJ's jobs was to care for them. She also remembers riding a bulldozer, and admits that it was a "little difficult" sometimes to be a woman in the lumber business.

Working 65 hours a week was normal for CJ back then, even though Mitch viewed his daughter as a part-time employee. "I don't think Dad ever really considered me a girl," laughs CJ. But she credits her father with teaching her how to survive in the business world, and she has tried to pass that work ethic along to her four children.

"One of the first things we did at the new Lappo Lumber Company was setting up pre-assembled

cottages." She recalls.

Lappo Lumber has not existed without hardships, however. CJ recalls having to go out at night with her father when the burglar alarm would sound at the lumberyard. Her dad would ask her to scoot down in the back seat of the car while he checked it out.

There were also several devastating fires. A May, 1965 fire began presumably by a bolt of lightning. That fire practically leveled the entire lumberyard. A second fire some 20 years ago was thought to be due to faulty wiring.

"I was on my way to California, and I called Dad, crying when I found out about the fire. He said, 'The time for crying is over and it is time to rebuild,'" recalls CJ.

"Even though Dad had an eighth grade education, he built a multi-million dollar business and he led by example because he knew every customer that we had."

"Mitch Lappo believed that, without the employees, Lappo Lumber Company was just land and a bunch of buildings. Dad loved and treated employees as family members."

Tragically, Mitch Lappo was killed in a car accident in Guadalajara, Mexico on December 21, 1989.

"At that point, Dad's will stated that the lumber yard would be put up for sale and that he would like

Continued on page 2

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