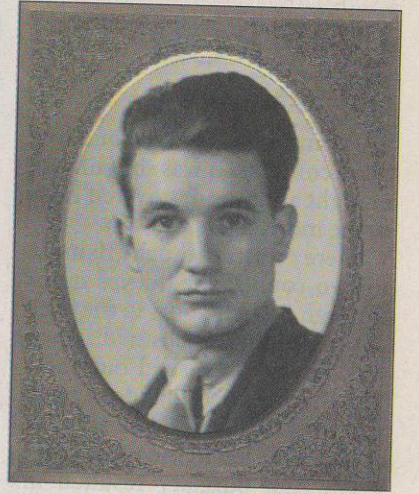


PIONEER SPIRIT

Lee Hartley helped build Palmer through hard work and strong family business

BY GREG JOHNSON
Frontiersman



If the three most important things in business are location, location, location, a close second is recognizing potential.

Acting on that potential is what defined Lee Hartley, the 92-year-old patriarch of one of the Valley's most prominent businesses and families. Hartley's Aug. 5 death brought the family together again at their 40-acre Springer system spread — all 50 of them, except for one who has a commitment for military basic training.

Hartley's life is more than an example of a successful businessman as founder and owner of Hartley Brothers and later the Valley's first Ford dealership. It's also a story of achieving the American dream while colonizing the Matanuska Valley with his wife of nearly 70 years, Maralyn.

In fact, if it weren't for her, there may not have been Hartley Brothers.

"Lee and I were going together and his folks lived at the Butte," Maralyn said. That courtship took him past the familiar location of Hartley Brothers at the corner of Arctic Avenue and Valley Way.

"He would pass that corner every day and say, 'What an ideal place for a service station,'" she said.

Lee and Maralyn Vasanoja would marry Oct. 30, 1940, and in 1947, he teamed up with his brothers and father to open Hartley Brothers, a fuel service and repair station in Palmer. It's a partnership that continues today. The family still owns the property, now a Harley Davidson dealership, with the familiar "Hartley Brothers" on the building.

Although Lee never finished high school and spent time during the Valley's colonization in



"That's the man I married," said Maralyn Hartley, looking at the centerpiece portrait of her husband, Lee Hartley, on a large photo board put together by her children and grandchildren. The couple first made their mark on the Valley business community in 1947 when Hartley Brothers opened in Palmer. Lee Hartley died Aug. 5.

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1935 and 1936 digging ditches, being a business owner "was in his blood," Maralyn said.

"He was just born that way," she said. "His dad was a businessman, so he was born into that. His dad said if he wasn't going to finish school he had to work. His dream was to always have a service station."

As the years went by, Hartley Brothers became a key business

in the growth of Palmer, she said.

"I know a lot of kids in Palmer grew up selling gas at the gas station. Lots and lots of them, that was their first job," she said, adding there was always a humble pride in being part of the town's progress. "We were just amazed (at the growth), because we grew with it. We helped it grow. Lee never said, 'I did that, I did this.' He never bragged about things

IF YOU GO

A memorial service will be held at 2 p.m. today at the Palmer Elk's Lodge, 2600 Barry's Resort Drive in Wasilla. All who wish to attend are invited to bring a dessert or salad for a potluck.

that happened. It amazes me now (when) driving to Wasilla or even to the hospital."

Lee went on to build Hartley Motors Inc., the first Ford dealership in the Valley, but sold the

dealership to Harold Nye in 1984 after the Ford Corp. continued to pressure him to become bigger than he wanted to be, Maralyn

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