

Perspectives

Carl Turkstra

The open secret to cultivating loyalty is to give people a lot of responsibility and make sure they are well-paid. Turkstra Lumber is unusual in our industry in that we have many long-serving employees and low turnover. We have an employee benefit plan with health and dental benefits that are almost unheard of in the lumber business. Building upon a system of discretionary bonuses Peter Sr. established, I ushered in profit-sharing and pension plans.

My father's philosophy was, "When I feast, they feast. When I starve, they eat." We've tried to maintain that philosophy because, frankly, it works.

I think I understand what it takes to be a successful businessperson. It takes a valid risk assessment and a willingness to take on risk. It also takes an ability to inspire people. You don't inspire people just by giving them money. You inspire people by your character. If they see the boss working hard, they want to work harder. Once you get good people doing the job then your job becomes easier.

"Always on the Level." It's a great slogan. And it's true. We try to live by it. Certainly, we have that reputation and the company tries to live up to it.



I was an academic. I did my undergrad degree at Queen's University, a Master's degree at the University of Illinois and returned to Canada to earn a PhD in Engineering at Waterloo. When I graduated, I took a job as a lecturer at the University of London and became a tenured professor at McGill University in Montreal, Québec. Later, I accepted a job as the head of the Civil Engineering department at Brooklyn Polytechnic in New York City. Over time, I tired of being a professor and became disillusioned with universities.

I returned to Hamilton in 1990 to do a consulting job with the Ontario Ministry of Transportation. My younger brother, Clifford, a minister, had been helping my dad run the business. My dad, being the dealmaker, came to me one day. He said, "Got any time tomorrow morning? I want to show you something."

"Sure, why not," I replied. I followed him to the second floor where they were rebuilding an office area with oak paneling.

"Oh Dad, congratulations. You finally have a board room."

"Oh no, no, no. This is your office." He was very insistent when he wanted to be.

A few years earlier, I was visiting Hamilton. Dad had cancer and he thought he was going to die. He eventually recovered, but I think it reminded him of his own mortality and got him thinking about succession

planning. He had resisted giving over authority to other people, but eventually he understood what needed to be done. Customers were not paying their bills. Sales were way down. He was a very rational man when it came to making hard business decisions like this.

I never thought I'd come back to the lumber business. I left home at age seventeen and came back at fifty-five. I'm an academic and I wanted to make my own way in the world. When I left, my father was in business, but only in a small way.

Employees knew that when I took over in 1990, I was in a terrible situation. At the time, employee bonuses were paid one year in arrears. 1989 was a boom year, but 1990 was a disaster. In 1990, due to the terrible recession, sales had dropped fifty percent. Other lumber companies dropped like flies. The recession started and would last for four or five years. We were in deep trouble. We simply did not have the money to pay for our expenses. Frankly, it kept me awake at night. We had treated our employees well over the years, so we were able to convince people to accept half their normal bonus. My father had always said, "No profits, no bonus," as a work incentive.

Since we had built that relationship and understanding with workers, they could truly appreciate that we were struggling. We also understood that, for many employees, their bonus was an important part of their annual salary. So, we struggled together.

I knew it was risky, but I was confident that



Opening of Turkstra Lumber Dundas location, 1995. Left to right: Tina Turkstra, Rick Dymant, Peter Turkstra, Carl Turkstra, Mayor John Addison, Ron Turkstra, Bert Mulder.

we could make it back. We had a solid customer base and a good organization. We had to pull it together and get tighter control. We had a few layoffs but weathered the recession until around 1995 when the economy finally bounced back.

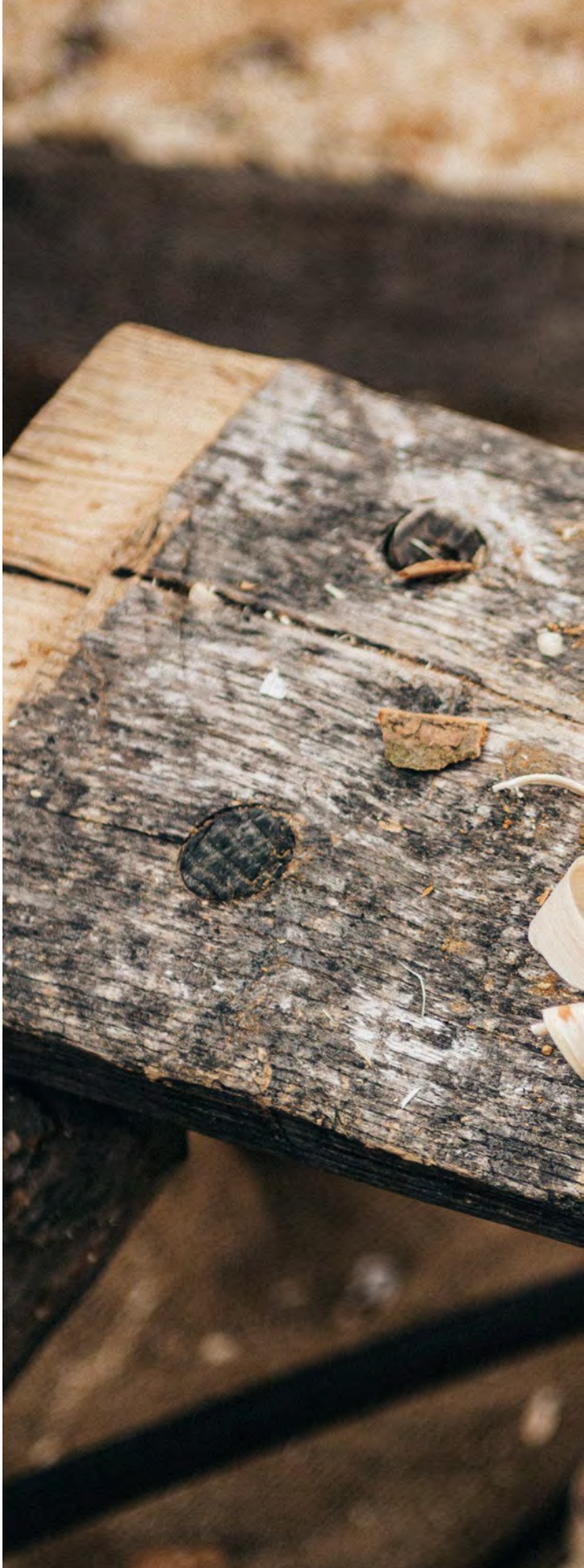
My father absolutely believed that the only good deal is where everybody wins. He also believed in loyalty. If one of his contractors got into trouble, he'd do everything he could to help him out. He had total integrity. I don't think anybody now or then could ever accuse him of anything less.

This philosophy of business is one that was maintained when I took over. I used to say to the managers, "You have to run this

branch as if it's your store and I will do my best to minimize the amount of paperwork and interference from head office." We ended up with a group of managers who were good business people.

We're a family business. There are fewer organizations like us, but we remain committed to those principles. I think the lumber business is a terrific business. First, lumber smells nice. The smell of a lumber yard is incomparable. A sweet, fresh smell, like a newly built cottage is one of the best things I can think of.

It's also a happy business. People who are there are doing things, making things, having fun. I love contractors because they're free-wheeling risk takers and



they're brave. They really are brave, and they put it all on the line.

The lumber business is vibrant, and I see a bright future ahead. The economy is picking up. Hamilton is becoming a happier place again. There was a period when Hamilton was quite a depressed place economically, but it's coming back again. People are optimistic and that's good. Other towns like Smithville and Brantford are booming. I don't see any reason why this upward trend shouldn't continue.

Canada is still a nation of "hewers of wood and drawers of water." We have a lot of resources. We still have a lot of space and not too many people. So, we have much room to grow!



Don Humphrey – Past President

When I joined Turkstra Lumber, the management structure was much simpler. Carl was president and oversaw manufacturing, Peter ran the sales and retail, and I did the buying. As time moved on, they developed a more professional management structure and I continually progressed up the chain. Peter and I were locked arm-in-arm most of the time. He was unbelievably gracious about giving me the advice and training I needed and grooming me to get to where I needed to go. Peter was always the sales guy and I was focused on operations.

Unfortunately, I never did get to meet Peter Sr. He had passed before I was hired. I had just come from working at another family business. I like family businesses. There's something about family businesses that put an individualized touch on a corporation. The corporate world didn't always appeal to me. I

like to know the owner and make sure we have the same ethical and moral backing and that we're going in the same direction. A lot of work in the corporate sector is very cutthroat, whereas family businesses are more oriented around a group of people working toward a common goal. I really liked the vibe of Turkstra Lumber for some of these reasons. We always worked very hard, but we also had a lot of fun.

The workplace culture at Turkstra Lumber is certainly a defining feature of the company. There is family vibe that's also very down to earth. In a way, it's a very simple business of moving lumber around to where it is needed. Of course, there is much more knowledge and expertise that goes into the business. But on a basic level, if someone asks for lumber or other supplies, we bring it to them. We have a fraction of the SKU count compared to the box stores. It's not rocket science. But, the success of that also relies heavily on the culture of the business,

being able to relate to people and do things efficiently and reliably. This is where Turkstra excelled.

I was Junior Buyer, then Purchasing Manager, Operations Manager, General Manager, and finally President. The title always came after I started carrying the responsibility. When I took on a position, I would already be working on the next position until it got to the point where Peter would follow up behind with the title for it. It was a terrific way to absorb information and the way the business ran.

We always ran successful events at Turkstra Lumber. Our contractor night was always very fun and well-attended. We'd have dunk tanks with customers throwing balls at the Accounts Receivable person or at Ron Turkstra, VP Sales. Fifteen years ago, we had our fiftieth anniversary and our contractor night was at Carmen's banquet centre. We jammed the place. It was the first time in a while that the Toronto Maple Leafs hockey team made it to the NHL playoffs and they were playing the Ottawa Senators in Game One.

As event organizers, we were afraid no one would show up to the contractor's night because of the hockey game. Peter came in an hour before the event was supposed to start and told me, "We need to make sure people can watch the hockey game." We scrambled to make sure we could project the hockey game on the wall. And it worked! People showed up and everyone stopped and turned to watch the game. It was very fun, but operationally, it was crazy with 2,500 to 3,000 people stopping at once to watch television! That was a fantastic night. Our focus was on developing relationships with people; selling them something was secondary.

Christmas parties were always fantastic. That's a big Turkstra tradition; a gift from the family to thank the staff for another year of demanding

work. They've always done a very good job connecting with the simple core principles of the business. Peter is very big on going into things full-throttle. Peter has this fantastic ability to think farther outside the box than most. He's not afraid to try things. It's one of the building blocks that energizes the company. He would often call in a week before the party and say he wanted to do something big and unexpected and we'd have to make it happen. It was always an adventure going into the Christmas season! Events were a terrific way to continue building and reinforcing the workplace culture.

Turkstra is blessed with a team of people who are passionate about taking care of the customer in front of them. When you get a team of 250-300 people together whose only job is to serve the customer and you build a distribution model around them that works, you have the fundamentals of a fantastic business. If you go one step further and ensure staff are developing relationships with customers on a long-term basis, you've added another strong element. It also doesn't hurt to have a conservative attitude toward spending to make sure there is money left over for bad years and to reinvest. Considering all of this, the fact that Turkstra Lumber is celebrating sixty-five years in business is no mystery. Peter Sr. understood business as an entrepreneur. He developed the relationships with customers. He determined what the needs were in the community, and he developed a model that future generations could expand upon. Carl-the-academic applied a sense of accountancy and professionalism around what his father had built, and Peter came in full of sales-focused ideas with a strong business background.

Each generation kept the strengths of the previous one and improved what needed to be improved. The sixty-fifth anniversary of Turkstra Lumber is no surprise to me.



Jon Wagner – President

I joined Turkstra Lumber in July 2013 when I was hired as Director of Sales. Peter decided in 2012 he wanted to move into a CEO position, so Don Humphrey was promoted to President. Peter was very active in his previous role as President and running the sales team and Don was more oriented toward operations, so they decided to hire a Director of Sales, which was the opportunity that presented to me.

There's been a lot of change in five years! Sales were good, but we were still coming out of the 2008-2009 economic recession. The company and region were starting to get back in shape and builders were starting to pick up momentum. There was more demand for housing, driven partly by rising housing prices in Toronto. Some of the GTA builders had run out of land and

started looking westward for more opportunities in home renovations, teardowns, new subdivisions and other land developments. There was a lot of push out from the Greater Toronto Area to our marketplace, which really helped spur economic growth. Turkstra Lumber was in the perfect spot at the right time. We were trying to grow our business when I came on board and the economics was working in our favour.

The people who know us have known us for generations. We have many customers who dealt with Peter Sr., whether they did or their parents or their grandparents did. Their generational businesses have kind of followed our generational businesses. There are many new people who moved into this market, whether they were builders or contractors, who didn't know Turkstra.

They had to find us, or we had to find them and introduce them to how we do business. Our passion for customer service is a little bit different from what some of these new customers had dealt with in the past.

Then we also have residents who are moving into our communities. Maybe they're planning their own build of a house or an addition or a big deck and have no idea who Turkstra is because they didn't grow up in the area. Figuring out new ways now to reach out and find those people has been our critical goal. There are lots of people who are from Toronto or new to Canada and now they're moving out to places like Hamilton, Brantford, Niagara or Simcoe and have no clue with whom to deal. They know Home Depot, Canadian Tire or maybe Home Hardware, but they don't know Turkstra Lumber.

We are trying to have a stronger web presence which includes growing and improving our web initiatives. More dynamic media, Facebook, Twitter, everything else to reach out to those people through the non-traditional marketing and advertising mediums. Ultimately, that's the only way we're going to be able to reach them. Somebody moving into this marketplace may never watch CHCH television. They might not buy the Hamilton Spectator newspaper. How do we get to those people? How do we make an impression on them? There's been a lot more money and effort directed towards social media and web campaigns to try to get the person that's going to do a Google search and say, "Where do I get building supplies locally?" Turkstra

Lumber will pop up as one of the first choices for them.

One thing that has and will never change is our motto: "Always on the Level." It's the perfect signature for who we are and what we continue to strive toward. Quite often, I'll be at an event somewhere and someone will ask, "Where do you work?"


"Turkstra Lumber," I'll reply.

"Oh, Turkstra. Always on the level!"

It's a motto that sticks and we hope the family business feel comes through with every media method used to reach new customers.

One of the biggest changes has been that we've become a more professionally-managed company. The world is changing. You do have to have consistent HR policies and safety policies and ways of running your business that are far more professional than they would have been in the past. We brought in the Lean Six Sigma approach to our management team and the rest of the company. It's an approach focused on eliminating waste and finding ways to run the business more effectively and efficiently with the end customer in mind. It's an approach that requires a lot of data collection and analysis, but the goal is to find efficiencies that benefit both the business and the customer.

Another substantial change has been in communications technologies. Of course, most of us have email and cell phones. But one thing we've always tried to stay away from is voicemail. If you try calling the stores or office, you will not get a voicemail message. Your call will be sent back to a person. It would be very easy for us to have an automatic answering



service, but we don't have any of that because we don't believe it reflects well on our company. People want to talk to a person, not a machine. We have a customer service branch that will take phone calls if no one picks up after five rings at a branch. We do have all the different communication technologies, but we try to make sure we're still a people-centered company and that people talk to real humans when they reach out to us for service and products.

I think if you interviewed enough of our customers and asked, "What makes Turkstra Lumber different?" They'd say, "The service and the people." That hasn't changed. I think that's why we continue to be successful and hopefully we'll continue to be successful another sixty-five years.

You can have companies that stay true to their roots but fail to change with the times. The leadership of Turkstra Lumber, beginning with Peter Sr., has always been very forward-thinking. Peter Turkstra is currently looking five, ten, twenty years down the road to what our business is going to be. The market is constantly evolving.

We try to achieve a balance where we stay progressive and future-oriented without losing the core values and forgetting what made us great. Keeping that balance is the main goal for us.



Peter Turkstra - Current Owner

The skillset of my father, Carl, really came through in the business context. There's no doubt he may have saved the company when he joined in 1990. It was a disastrous situation and Dad was able to make some very difficult but effective business decisions. He turned the company around with the discipline of an engineer. My dad inherited a company with an amazing level of customer service. While service is important, there must be some efficiency and business discipline as well. Dad really was the perfect person to come into the business at that time. His passion for the business was rooted in an exacting logic needed to turn things around.

Dad cared (and cares) passionately about the success of the business and welfare of its employees. He had a cautious or

defensive approach to business that involved focusing on core strengths and ensuring you had the resources to achieve your goals. In the same way we would plan for retirement, he would plan the business for the inevitable economic downturns. He adopted this approach from my grandfather.

As the company recovered and became more successful, he was very innovative by introducing a defined profit-sharing plan and an improved benefits plan. He wanted to ensure the company rewarded its employees. It was his idea, for example, to celebrate his retirement by shaking the hand of every employee and to give them a bonus based on seniority. I walked around with him and handed out one million dollars that day. People had no idea this was coming and were very appreciative.

I worked for the family business as a teenager in the late 1970s and early 1980s. My parents lived in Montreal and they would send me to live with my grandparents during the summers. I worked in the Stoney Creek location. I remember making my way by streetcar back and forth. Back then, we essentially had cement mix, hammers, wood paneling and lumber. It was basic compared to what we carry now. Apart from that, the actual lumberyard is very similar to today. Lots of lumber and forklifts and people coming in and out. You build up the loads and get them out the door. Things weren't computerized, and the inventory wasn't as accurate. Pricing was all manual. Everything was manual.

I remember lineups of people because when we processed customers, all we had was one of those machines that pressed out carbon copies. You'd have to write on the top sheet and pull the lever. You'd keep the top copy, give the customer a carbon copy, and another slip that would go to accounting to add to the customer's account. A lot of business was face-to-face, so we had a lot of people coming in with their pickup trucks to get service in person.

I also have fond memories of my great uncle and Peter Sr.'s brother, Jack Turkstra. I was lucky enough to work for him at his store, J.R.'s Hardware. I worked behind the counter and stocked the shelves. Uncle Jack was the type of person who would hug almost every person he met, whether it was appropriate or not! He was just so charming and full of joy all the time. To this day, I think people recognize Jack as being part of the foundation and character of

Turkstra Lumber. He certainly loomed large in the company when I worked there. He exemplified a sense of appreciation and gratitude. He really had a passion for the business and he was always profoundly grateful and appreciative of customers. It's the kind of thing we try to instill in any new employee. He carried that appreciation and love of others throughout his life. He was a very bright light. It was impossible not to admire him.

It was all very hard work. I remember always being hungry! I'd sit in the pallet plant with the Portuguese workers who had lunch pails full of cheese and sausage. Even as a teenager, I promised myself I would never complain. It was obvious to me whenever they brought a young Turkstra family member into the business there would be some level of testing of your mettle. They had me unloading rail cars in incredible heat or ripping in a sawdust-piled steel chamber in the heat, or delivering shingles, which was the worst. It was a way of testing whether you were there to work or if you were entitled. That lasted for around three weeks. It was like being a recruit. You had to do your best knowing you were being put to the test. I remember one day when an entire container of windows came in and they had me unload much of it. I was so tired when I got home, my Oma couldn't wake me up for dinner. Well, she called in the next day and took a strip off whoever was in charge. She put an end to it. When Tina phoned somebody, they knew that was it! Things changed after that.

There was a lot of coffee-to-go that people would drink in Styrofoam cups. There used to be that awful Carnation milk and sugar cubes. Despite that, I remember those days fondly. There's a lot more that goes into getting lumber

out the door than people realize. It starts in the forest and all that coordination of wood before it gets to us.

When I returned to the family business in 1996, my father had a plan of how to reintegrate me. He told me I would work one week in every yard, a week behind the counter and a week on the road with the salesmen who showed me the sites and met customers. He knew this plan would give me a good overview on the company. Obviously, I would never compare to the seasoned employees who knew their job inside and out. But it was a terrific opportunity for me to meet employees and customers on a first-name basis. I was not a spy, contrary to what some people thought. With my background in sales, I brought something to the sales team and helped behind the counter due to my experience with computers.

People were not shy with me during this orientation period. I remember one customer, Bruno Cerello, while visiting with a sales rep when Bruno came up, pounded his finger into my chest and said, "Turkstra Lumber is a great place. Don't screw it up!" I was only thirty-two at the time, but my dad realized it was an appropriate time to start transitioning the business to a new generation. I was in the prime of my life, meeting customers, managing parts of the business, playing an extroverted role with our sales team to build the business.

I helped develop the sales portion of the business as we also started to acquire new branches and focused on developing

computerized inventory systems and all the necessary efficiency controls. My background at IBM was useful in this and helped position the company for this transition. I would have been a very different person had I not worked at IBM before joining the family business. I remember my grandfather offered me a job right out of university. My father put his foot down and said, "No way." He wanted me to have outside experiences. He was very protective and wanted me to have different skills. The result was that when I came back, I was able to offer this wealth of knowledge I never would have gotten had I simply gone to school and returned to the family business.

While I was at IBM, I had an opportunity to travel with my dad to purchase some lumber. I met some members of the ILDC (Independent Lumber Dealers Cooperative). These were ferocious entrepreneurs who had, in some cases, grown their business from scratch. I was intrigued, and it got me thinking about the opportunities of working in a family business. There's no doubt I would have had a great career had I stayed at IBM, but I never would have had the personal flexibility and opportunity to succeed or fail that comes with running your own business. It was a good fit for my personal aspirations and my family.

When I returned, the focus on customer service was very similar. My father had started to transition the branches away from strictly commodity lumber. We became more of a commodity hub for hardware, lumber, decking, and fencing. We were much more diversified. Simply selling lumber is a much simpler business than having a retail end with a developed inventory. That helped cushion us from some of the economic downturns we've

seen over the years. Some of the rural branches didn't have nearly the same drop in sales as other branches that service big builders.

My goal going forward is to further insulate Turkstra Lumber from those economic cycles by continuing to diversify the business. We have over 4,500 active accounts. It means we're not reliant on any one client and having diversification helps build in a buffer should the economy turn south. We've had a strategic planning process for well over a decade. The pace of change is now very fast.

We have survived the influx of big box stores, which didn't exist when my grandfather started the company and went I worked here as a teenager. The box stores wiped out some categories of the business. But more importantly, they forced us to look at the pillars of why our business is so strong and where we can further specialize. We have the advantage of manufacturing our own roof trusses and operate our own moulding mill. We also specialize in providing decking, framing, commodity lumber, trim and doors, windows, and packages through our designer showcase.

We look forward into the future five to fifteen years out of necessity. What areas do we need to specialize in? Which communities would we like to enter? That's how we ended up in Simcoe. We decided we needed to be in that community and I was tasked with finding the land and building the lumberyard. We look at other family businesses as potential acquisitions to help grow our reach in a very strategic way.

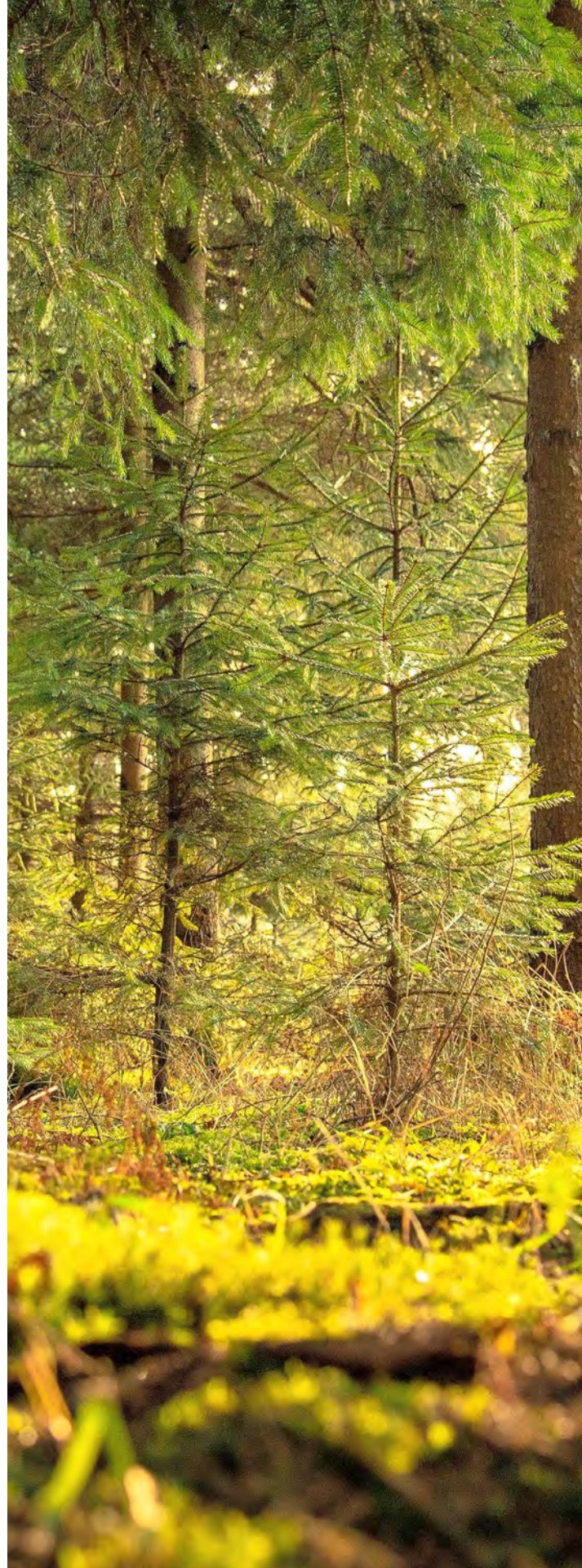
There's also the reality of disruptive technologies. We need to consider the impact of revolutions in transportation, manufacturing and computerization and what that means for us. We've learned not to set any limitations on what we can do. When I worked at IBM in the 1980s, having advanced computer systems was a privilege enjoyed by the big banks and manufacturing firms. Now, you can buy packages off the shelf to help with delivery, transportation and inventory. The Internet has been a great equalizer, especially in some areas of retail. People are now finding online where they're going to shop and the assumption of folks walking into a brick and mortar business is no longer a given.

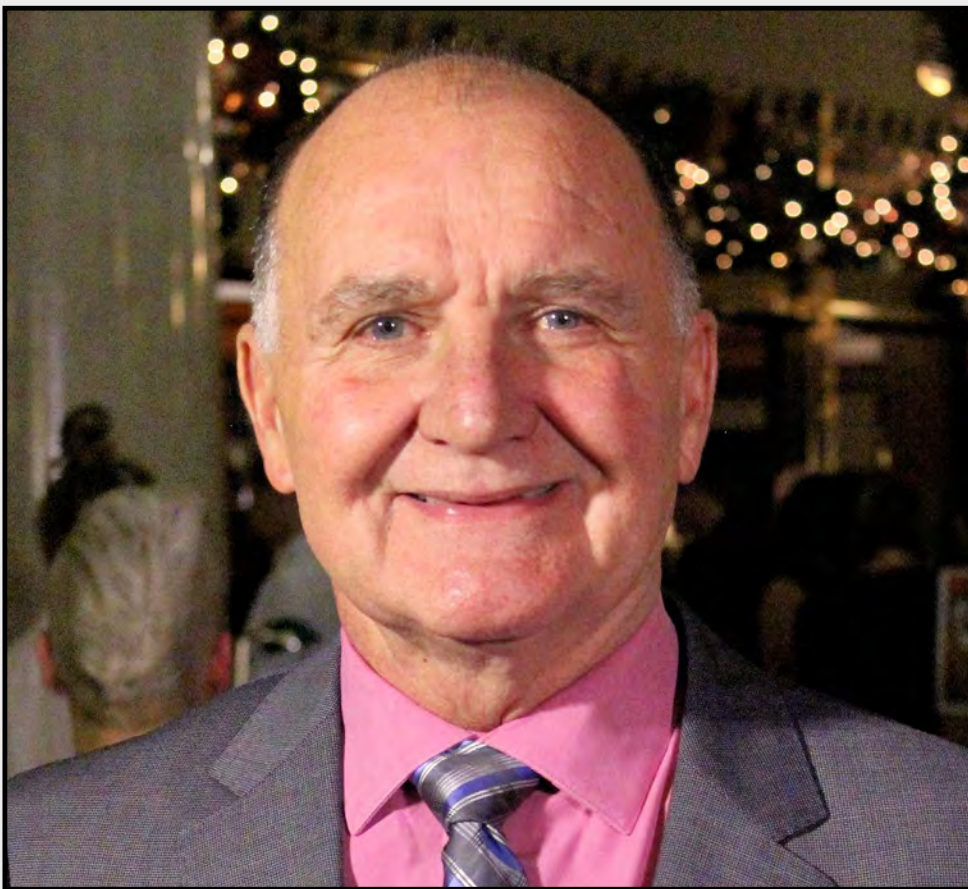
One area we have certainly focused on is customer service. We have a dedicated branch in customer service with estimators who can respond to quotes in person, by phone, text or live chat. If the phone rings more than four or five times in any branch, the call rolls over to customer service. It allows us to free up our branches to deal with in-person customers. Our branch counter staff can't be having a genuine discussion with a customer if they're answering phones at the same time.

We're betting on customer service as the clincher. The box store experience provides a lesser level of customer service than a family-run business. To a professional builder or contractor, time is money. They typically want to buy the right power tool or a higher-grade wood, even if it costs a bit more money. They need a professional level of service where products arrive on time. If products don't arrive when they're expected, it costs them money. Meeting and exceeding that expectation of service is something we're betting on.

Turkstra Lumber was built on great service. To give great service, you must have great people and processes behind the scenes. Without the employees, we are keenly aware that Turkstra Lumber is simply a collection of buildings. We do everything we can to improve training, health and safety, and employee development. We're not driven by ego to have higher sales. We're driven by the gratitude for our customers and appreciation of our employees. We are nice people. We try to hire nice and caring employees and do the best we can to give great customer service. We are always on the level.

At the end of the day, if we have satisfied customers, then we still have my grandfather's faith that hard work, determination, and respect makes the company successful.





Ron Turkstra – Vice President, Sales

My father, Wilfred Turkstra, was a brother to Peter Sr. and Jack (J.R.). Wilfred and Jack owned a company called Turkstra Eggs that they had started with their father, Rients Turkstra, on King Street in Hamilton. In 1960—at the tender age of ten—I started working with my dad in the egg business. I loved working with my dad. My sister, brother and I would go in after school and in the summers to pack eggs. Eventually, Uncle Jack moved away to Michigan and my dad passed away in 1968, so the egg business was left to a couple of employees.

When my dad passed, I was an eighteen-year-old economics student at the University of Waterloo. I started working summers and Saturdays at Turkstra

Lumber in 1969 and when I graduated three years later, I joined the business full-time. I was sort of a jack-of-all-trades. I'd be working in the store helping customers, out in the yard, making deliveries, loading and unloading. Anything that needed to be done, I did it. I was young, and I liked to work—and they worked me hard. Trust me!

I remember working at the Waterdown branch when I had a very serious accident. I was cutting a sheet of plywood for a customer. There was no safety training or anything back then, so I just grabbed the skill saw and started cutting. I ended up standing up and hitting the trigger at the same time the guard had jammed. The blade sunk into my leg, cutting a twelve-inch long wound into my thigh muscle. I was rushed to hospital and they managed to

stitch me up. When uncle Peter heard, he came right over to see me and did whatever he could to help. It's one of my fondest memories of him during an unfortunate time for me.

Peter Sr. was a tough, but gentle boss. He was a very religious man, which I think influenced his kind and generous approach. He was always very busy. We had five locations at the time, so he had to spend a lot of time at the different branches and at head office. Peter Sr. could be quite demanding on his employees, but in a fatherly sort of way. I remember when I first started, I had long hair. It was the sixties, you know. Not overly long, but down to the shoulders. I remember Peter Sr. walking into the Stoney Creek branch one day and he came up to me and said, "I think you better go home and don't come back tomorrow with hair like that." He just floored me! Of course, Peter's son Herman was walking around with the same type of hair, but Herman didn't work for and represent the company.

My uncle Jack was an integral part of the company. I love him very much! Jack and uncle Peter were both mentors to me because my dad passed away when I was so young. Jack joined the company around the same time I started. He went to Michigan to serve as a missionary but returned in the

early 1970s following an emotional breakdown. Peter Sr. offered him a job. Jack started off as a manager in Smithville and went to Brantford and then started a hardware division in Stoney Creek called J.R.'s Hardware.

Eventually I got tired of working in the store and in 1975 I decided I wanted a sales job. My cousin, Ted Steenhoff, was the only salesman at the time. I didn't know Ted all that well. His mother was a Turkstra, but they were from Toronto and our family always lived in Hamilton. Ted was amazing in sales. He was very good at getting new customers. Ted would do anything for a customer. I used to hear stories about Ted knocking on a customer's door at midnight to collect money. He was a very hard-working, dedicated individual.

I remember asking uncle Peter, "I would really like a job in sales."

"No, no. We've got Ted here and that's all we need right now," he replied

Two weeks later, I remember getting a call at home in the evening. It was Peter. "Ron, Ted has left the company. You're starting on the road tomorrow morning." Ted had started a building company while he was working at Turkstra Lumber. Eventually, his business grew to the point where he decided he couldn't do both and decided to focus on building his company.



Facing page: Jack Turkstra (top left); Frieslander parade float (top right); Jannette Pizzacalla, J.R. Turkstra, & Ed Bremer standing in front of J.R.'s Hardware (bottom).

It was my dream job, but also quite a shock because two weeks prior there was nothing for me! It was tough because I had to teach myself a lot of things from scratch. I ended up inheriting Ted's customers, but I was also going blind into trying to get new customers.

One of the biggest challenges for me early in my sales career was when Tamarack Lumber started up in Burlington, Ontario. They were a primarily Italian company and with many of our contractor accounts being Italian, this new company was starting to take some of our customers. It was quite difficult at times, but we managed to hold onto most of them. I knew most of the customers from working in the Stoney Creek location, and that made the transition to sales a lot easier.

The beauty of my job was that I was all over: Burlington, Stoney Creek, Hamilton, Waterdown. It was a wonderful time back then and there weren't so many penny pinchers. Back then, you mainly dealt with the owners of the company because they were all independents who ran their own outfits. Nowadays, you're dealing mainly with contract managers. Loyalty isn't what it used to be because today it's all about money, profit margins and the bottom line.

Turkstra Lumber has always been a company where we're not necessarily the cheapest, but we certainly offer the best service. A lot of these large companies now just go for price. They don't focus on quality and service. Fortunately, we also have many loyal customers who have been with the company since it started. But it's a highly competitive industry. When I first started in sales, my focus was always on building loyalty. I got to know the owners and their accounts people well. I would do anything to keep my customers happy and I think I was known for that over time. The quality of the lumber and getting lumber to the customer on time were key factors. Frankly, it wasn't so hard to build that kind of loyalty in the 1970s and 1980s.

I remember back in the mid-1970s, we had a customer, Peter Budd. He was waiting on us for a couple skylights for a job in Grimsby. The skylight shipment was delayed, but Budd had cut the holes in the roof and he was getting very upset. The skylights finally came in to the Stoney Creek location on a Saturday morning. We couldn't get them out right away, so Budd called Peter Sr. Well, Peter came down in his Cadillac, put the two skylights in his car and delivered them himself. That kind of thing bonds loyalty like you wouldn't believe.

Nowadays, if you want to get a new customer, it's probably harder unless he's

upset with his current supplier. That's probably the toughest part of the business today: getting new business. We have had to change our approach because the industry is also changing. Some contractors want set lumber prices for a year. Again, with the focus being purely on pricing. Many times, we must walk away from business like that because it's not a realistic situation.

The company expanded rapidly in the 1970s and 1980s, but all that came to a screeching halt in 1990. I'll never forget, it was the middle of May 1990 and it was just like the door was shut on the building industry. Sales plummeted as contractors dealt with the immediate aftermath. A long recession followed, and it took a while to stabilize.

Looking back, there were many more small builders building fifteen to twenty homes that Turkstra dealt with. Nowadays, there are many more big builders like Mattamy, Brookfield, Empire and other Toronto-based tract builders. Companies like this have been very successful, but they've also pushed many of the smaller guys out. Of course, this has affected our business. We do business with a lot of the big guys, but we have always been very successful with the smaller outfits. Big developers are coming to the Hamilton

area, so I see this trend continuing.

Another important change, for me especially, has been cell phones. When I started in 1975 there was no such thing as a cell phone. Back then, if I had to get in touch with one of the branches I had to either go to a pay phone or drive from a job site back to the branch. We had fax machines, but that was no help on the road. Then pagers were invented, and I got a pager. People could page me, but I'd still have to go to a phone booth to make a call. I do remember my first cell phone. It was mounted to a steel bar attached to my car. It wasn't portable, so I had to make all my calls from the car. Of course, now everything is done with computers and smartphones. You can receive blueprints by email and send them off to the truss division or wherever for quotes. The ability to email people has been the biggest change over the last forty or so years.

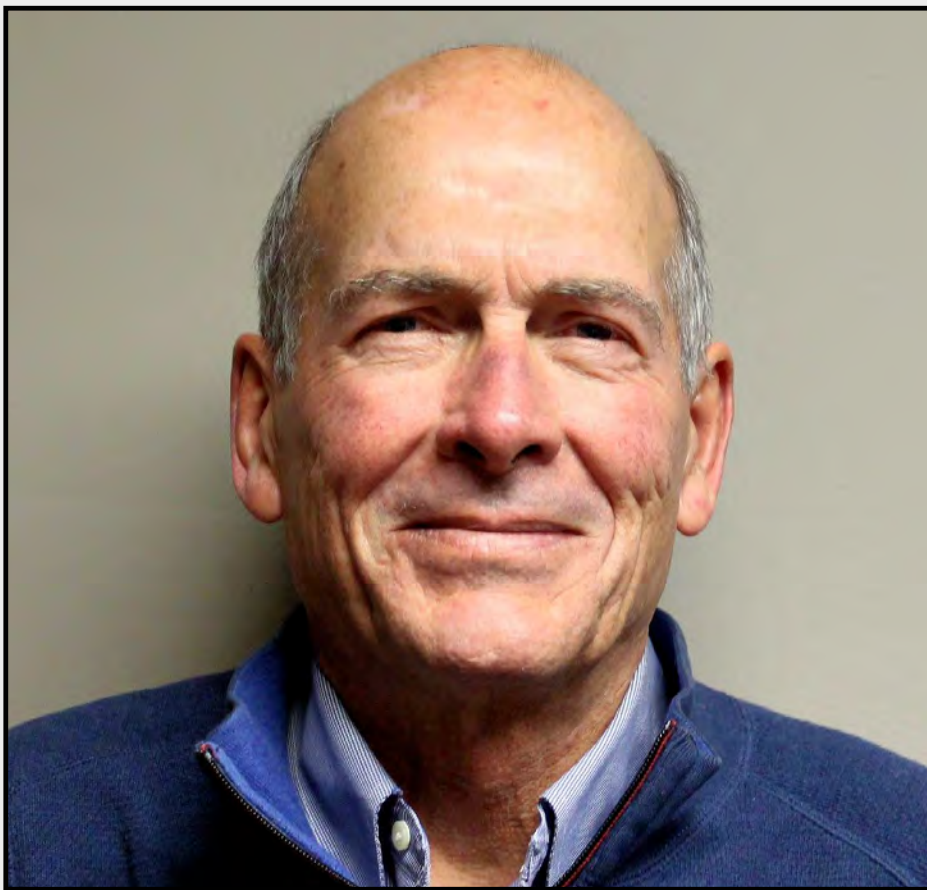
Turkstra Lumber has an outstanding reputation in each community where we have a branch. A lot of that has to do with our history of equally outstanding employees. A few stand out in my mind over time. Harry Devries was a branch manager in Brantford. He was our top purchasing guy and left to form his own company. Tony Vanderstelt, probably our youngest manager at the time in his early twenties. He managed our Waterdown branch and later got an opportunity to join



Muskoka Lumber. Bert Mulder was a branch manager in Dunnville and he now owns a Home Hardware in Dunnville. Ed Bremer worked in the hardware division and now owns his own window company in Stoney Creek. All these people got their start at Turkstra Lumber and launched into new opportunities to move on and form their own companies.

Our guiding principles are perfectly spelled out with our motto, “Always on the Level.” It was coined by Peter Sr., and boy, he stuck to it! He was always focused on building an honest company. We really stand behind our mission and value statements. One of the main reasons Turkstra Lumber has been around for so long is because of the loyalty we’ve built with our customers. If you build loyalty with an owner and he passes that down to his family, it will continue. Many of our customers are into their second and third generations.

Customers know we are an honest company and we do everything we can to prove that.



David Lawson – Senior Account Manager

Before coming to work at Turkstra Lumber, I worked at my own family business, Lawson Lumber, which I took over from my father in 2008. The company was founded in 1910 as Nicholson Lumber and later changed names to Alliance Lumber. In 1918, my grandfather, Charles Lawson, started working for Alliance Lumber in the office. He gradually worked his way up to be general manager while acquiring shares in the company from the estates of the original partners. By the early 1940s, the company changed its name to Lawson Lumber. Around 1947, Charles' two sons Mel (my father) and Gordon began working with him, and around 1970 they took over the business when my grandfather retired.

My father, Mel Lawson, grew up in Hamilton. A well-known athlete, he studied Forestry at the University of Toronto and joined the family business when he graduated. When he took over, the business was probably fifty percent industrial clients and fifty percent new housing and commercial work. Housing is a cyclical business, so we certainly lived through some downturns in the industry. But ours was a good business and was well-managed. At one point, Lawson used to make windows, cabinets, drywall and a few other things. There was a full-scale carpentry shop connected with the business. Eventually, they focused more on the lumber sales.

The business weathered some big storms in its time. In 1955, the whole place burned to the ground! It was arson, started by some



Charles Lawson



Fire at Lawson Lumber (1955)

kids. The fire destroyed most of the wood frame buildings and much of the inventory. To survive financially, they set up a carpenter shop down at National Steel Car and continued with the carpentry work. They had already acquired a storage yard on Beach Boulevard in east Hamilton, so they started shipping out of there. Eventually, they rebuilt new offices and had new buildings to work out of. I guess, on one hand, it was one of the best things to happen to the business because they could start from scratch.

I had always worked summers in the family business when I was growing up. It was physical work – piling lumber, running a saw and working outside in the yard. I really enjoyed it. There was certainly a cast of hardworking characters to work with. They came from all walks of life. There were a lot of workers from Newfoundland and Nova Scotia and some European immigrants. Many were hard-working, hard-drinking types. But they were always good to me and taught

me to develop an appreciation for others and take people as they are.

When I graduated from school, I started working in the finance department at Stelco. I worked there until 1986 when I returned to Lawson Lumber as vice president. My uncle retired in 1989 and my father and I continued as business partners for the next twenty-four years. When I joined, business was strong. The housing market was strong and industrial business with steel companies and manufacturing plants was good. I knew the business from working summers in the yard, but I hadn't been there in over a decade. My job was to replace my uncle in sales. That was a steep learning curve! Meeting new customers, learning products, learning how to read blueprints. I thoroughly enjoyed it. It was all new and exciting.

As time went on and industrial jobs disappeared in Hamilton, we ended up with a very high class of employees. I'm quite proud of the work they all did.



Many workers came over with me to Turkstra. They worked hard, made their mark and helped contribute to the business.

The recession of 1990 hit Lawson Lumber very hard. Stelco went on strike, which meant our industrial sales ground to a halt. We had to lay off some good workers and started work-sharing while keeping a keen eye on cash flow to try to weather the storm. Business eventually picked up again later in the 1990s. The next big hit came with the 2008 crash. Lawson Lumber didn't develop a retail end like Turkstra Lumber, so we had no buffer against a downturn.

Lawson Lumber was always in a friendly and respectful competition with Turkstra Lumber. We both had our loyal accounts and weren't focused on trying to take business away from each other. There's certainly other yards that sell strictly on price and customers who buy strictly on price. It can get a little fierce in our industry! My approach was to know all the players but stick to my own customer base and take advantage of opportunities if they came my way. It never made sense to go around trying to steal business, because in this business it could always be stolen back.

The year 2009 was tough for Lawson Lumber. My father left the business for health reasons and my two sons weren't coming into the business. Peter Turkstra approached me, wondering if I'd consider the possibility of selling Lawson Lumber.

We started discussions and the deal closed a year later. It turned out to be a great idea. Lawson Lumber had no succession plan and Turkstra was very fair in their approach. The more I learned about the company, the more I liked what I saw and was even more impressed when I joined on as an employee.

We kept all our customers during the transition from Lawson to Turkstra Lumber. Nobody left, which is amazing. Some of these customers had been dealing with us for almost sixty years and were into their second and third generations. It was great working in the family business with your name on the door. There's no doubt about that. I am very proud of what we accomplished and certainly enjoyed my time leading the family business. At Turkstra, I initially ran the industrial division with some housing and customer accounts as well, which was called Lawson Lumber Division of Turkstra Lumber. After that, I became a senior account manager to focus on looking after the larger builder and commercial accounts.

Lumber has been a good industry in southern Ontario. People are still building houses. It has always been a cyclical business and there are different pressures, such as the Greenbelt Act that restricts home building in certain areas. One effect is that home building is pushed out to surrounding areas like Paris, Brantford, St. George, Stoney Creek, and so on. The industrial side of the lumber business changed. For example, International Harvester used to be a big account for Lawson Lumber, but that was long gone. Massey Ferguson, Westinghouse,

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Stanley Steel, even Stelco; these are all businesses that have either disappeared or been drastically cut back. But there has always been reasonable demand for new housing, which keeps the wheel turning.

Turkstra Lumber is a well-established company with strong management. One thing that always impressed me is the size of the company and its many high-quality employees. Lawson Lumber was very small compared to Turkstra; similar in size to the Stoney Creek operation. In some ways, Turkstra Lumber is the local lumber yard down the street, but it's so much more than that. For me, the beauty of it is that we can match competition in different outlying communities. If we've got a customer building in Brantford, I can just ship the lumber out of the Brantford yard. If their next project is near Niagara Falls, I'll ship it out of Ridgeway.

Even with multiple branches, the size of the stores and yards means you still get the personal service and you're dealing with knowledgeable people. You don't have to park half a mile from the front door or walk around a giant warehouse for twenty minutes to find what you're looking for. I thoroughly enjoy this business and customers.

I've met lots of great people, made a lot of great friends, and developed tremendous respect for Turkstra Lumber and the Turkstra family.



Ivan Bazuin – Manager, Stoney Creek

My father, Harry Bazuin, started working with Turkstra from the very beginning when Peter Sr. ran Turkstra Construction. Dad worked as a labourer, helping build houses, schools and churches. When Peter Sr. decided to open a lumberyard, my dad stayed and started working for Turkstra Lumber.

In the early days, they would unload railcars by hand. They would send a truck to the rail track siding at Hannon (near Rymal and Dartnall Road) to load up and then unload and stack back at the yard. There was so much manual labour back then. They weren't nearly as busy as we are today, but of course doing all that work by hand means the days were never long enough!

I was just a fifteen-year-old kid in the summer of 1971 when I started working at the Upper James location where my dad worked. It was still a rural area back then. I remember one salesman, Bill Tolkamp, who used to shoot turkeys over the fence in the field behind the yard where the Mountain Arena now stands. Obviously, you can't really do that anymore as it's all built up. I was cleaning the store and later started trucking. We had a little carpentry shop attached where we used to make stairs and cabinetry. Before there was drywall, the houses were finished with lath and plaster. Turkstra supplied the lath which was a 16" x 48" pc of "drywall in bundles of 5. We used to hand-deliver 300-400 bundles of this lath to each house we supplied, and that was my job that first summer.

I remember Peter Sr. rolling up in his

Jack Speelziek,
Brantford yard

dark blue Coup de Ville Cadillac. He'd flip me the keys and say, "Can you wash and fill up the car?" I'd go down the road to the Pioneer gas station through the car wash and fill up the tank. Pulling up in that old Cadillac really was his personal signature. He put a lot of miles on that car visiting all the branches and checking up on things. He'd even hook up his boat trailer to the back and tow his houseboat up to French River in northern Ontario.

In the 1960s and 1970s, Turkstra Lumber was primarily a lumber and trim company. They sold locks, glue, hammers, nails, and the like, but no plumbing or electrical. The



Harry Bazuin,
Stoney Creek yard

Stoney Creek store was probably a quarter of the size it is now. I remember the air inside was filled with smoke. There was a big ashtray by the entrance next to a pot of coffee and a phone. Contractors would come in the mornings, grab a cup of coffee, make their phone calls, and smoke away. There would be phone numbers scribbled everywhere on the walls because nobody carried a pen and paper.

Back then, if I was driving truck and couldn't find an address, I would have to return to the yard with the load. That happened occasionally. Not all the time, because you had to make sure you knew where you were going. But it did happen to me from time to time! If you got stuck, you couldn't call anybody because there's nobody around.

In the 1970s, the building code was changed and Turkstra started to sell a new product called SM or Celfort® as we know it today. Just like today, customers and yard men would complain about the changes and, frankly, it was uncertain whether the new-rated products would sell. But as technology and regulations changed, so did the way we did business.

When I started at Stoney Creek, we were the only lumberyard in town. I

remember there being lineups into the store when we opened in the mornings. On Saturdays the lineups in front of the counter would be ten to fifteen people at least. I remember my dad being so overwhelmed when Turkstra moved to Upper Wellington. One forklift, three tractor trailer loads of lumber waiting on the road to come in, customers all over the yard and our own trucks waiting to be loaded!

Stoney Creek evolved into a contractor's yard. We had fax machines, pagers and even teletype machines. I remember listening to the teletype going 'clickety-click' all day long. We don't have the same lineups in the morning because business is driven by phone-orders. So, we evolve like every other business who wants to stay relevant in an era of instant communication. Still, we have a policy of ensuring phones are answered by a real person and not a computer. We have a call center that picks up the phone if calls to branches aren't answered within five rings.

As the business got bigger, management got more complex. There was a transition when Carl Turkstra took over and things became more computerized. Every leader has been actively involved in the work of the business, so things naturally change. Technology has been one of the biggest changes in the business over time. There's also been growth in management as the company has grown.



Stoney Creek yard

Turkstra Lumber is still a very family-oriented business. The values and principles are still the same even sixty-five years later! If any employee comes forward with a family situation, we do our utmost to help as much as we can.

At Turkstra, we're down to earth. We focus on our customers. We have key knowledgeable people always here and when you answer the phone a real person will answer. All of that has helped build a solid reputation and we work to protect that reputation.

We seek to continue the thread of Peter Sr. making deals on a handshake. Our motto of "always on the level" is something we try to live by. It's important for us to make sure we honour the loyalty we've developed over the years. It is an approach that started with Peter Sr. that we've always tried to live up to.



Brian Kremer – Manager and Sales, Dunnville

I started with Turkstra Lumber in 1985 at the Stoney Creek location. I started as a yard worker under the yard foreman Fernando Celeste. One of the first things that struck me when I started was how busy the yard was with contractors coming and going. Of course, with any business, there were busy and slow times. The busier times are always much more enjoyable because there's plenty of work to do and lots of interactions with customers.

When I started, Peter Sr. was the President of the company. I remember one day he drove up in his Lincoln as he often did. He came right up to me and said, "Come here, young man. Can you install these for me?" He handed

me a couple license plates and walked off.

I worked in the yard for a year and then moved into the store for another year and then transferred to the Dunnville location around 1988. When I came to Dunnville, I started in the store for a few years and then took over the yard foreman's position. I did that for several years and then got hired as a salesman. In 2000, Carl Turkstra was looking for a manager at this location, so I took over managerial responsibilities but continued to maintain a focus on sales.

Dunnville has always been primarily an agricultural community. When I started, the town itself was very busy.

We used to have some industry here. Lundy's Fence used to be here, Beaver Lumber, Roots Lumber, Bicks Pickles and Wabasso/Dominion Fabrics all had businesses here but they all closed. Dunnville is becoming more of a retirement town now. There are not many job opportunities for young families, so young people will often move away while older people move in to retire.

Employee turnover has never been a big issue with us. There are many people who have been around for quite some time, such as Darin Messner, Jannette Pizzacala and Dave Willis. Personally, I've always had lots of opportunity to grow with the company over the years. It was quite a transition working in the yard and moving into the store. You go from something physically challenging to more of a mental focus. When I transitioned to sales I knew what to expect because I had the experience to back me up. I also had framing experience, so I already knew many of the customers which made the transition a lot easier. It wasn't necessarily easy at first. I had to do complete estimates on house plans. Well, I hadn't looked through house plans in over a decade! But I had a lot of support from Turkstra to grow in my job.

We have many long-term customers, some of whom I've known since the beginning. Albert Postma is certainly one person who has supported us over the years. He was building barns back in the early 1980s and then transitioned to a custom home builder. Bob Devries has been a loyal customer for years. Richard Beldman is still a customer. I worked with Richard building houses before I came to Turkstra.

Many of our customers have dealt with all three generations of Turkstras. They know the history of Turkstra Lumber. When they come into the store and see the pictures of Peter Sr., Carl and Peter, they're reminded of how far we've all come and feel like they've been part of that journey. I think that's a unique feeling not every company can offer.

I think Turkstra Lumber has been an icon in our community. We've been around for many years and people who deal with us know we put our customers first. We're out there trying to make an honest living. We try to give our customers the best possible services at a fair price, and I think they respect that.

There are other places customers could shop where they're treated more like a number because the companies are focused on making their margins. People get a totally different approach when they come



Dunnville yard

to us. We focus on building long-term relationships with customers that can span generations. That is getting a little tougher with online retail and the information younger generations have at their fingertips, so you don't necessarily build those relationships as we did earlier.

Often, you don't see people because you're calling, or texting or emailing them. But we try to get out and meet them and put a face and voice to the name. We do our best to get out there and meet people to continue building those relationships that have served our company so well.



Wayne Otten – Manager, Ridgeway

I started at Turkstra Lumber in January 1989 at the Dunnville location. My cousin Martin Otten was already working at Turkstra and told me about a job opportunity. I had heard good things and it was the only lumber yard in our small town. I got the job and started working in the yard. I was just an eighteen-year-old kid off the farm. I didn't know much about lumber or trim or anything like that. I didn't know the difference between spruce and pine. People kind of assume you know this stuff, but I didn't so I had a steep learning curve! I started in the middle of winter, so I remember shoveling snow, helping customers and learning the lingo. A couple of key people who helped me learn were Andy Draaistra and Darren Messner. I really owe a lot to them helping me get up

to speed.

Four or five years later, I transitioned into the store. The transition from yard to store was yet another learning curve. Learning the computers and a whole new range of products and expectations. There's a lot to know because they're relying on you to provide expert customer service. A year and a half later I transferred to Stoney Creek, which was basically going from a country to a city lumber yard with a lot of big builders. It was daunting at first, but people were relaxed and had a lot of faith in me. They gave me a lot more responsibility to look after the store and work on remerchandising.

I was at the Stoney Creek location for another three years. One day, Carl Turkstra pulled up in his big Lincoln.

He came up to me and said, “Let’s go for a drive.”

“Okay,” I said. He had me take the wheel. I remember him giving me the gears about holding the steering wheel wrong.

“Your hands should be at ten and two o’clock position, young man.”

I remember we made some small talk. I was kind of nervous, because I wasn’t sure what this was all about. It was uncommon to be chatting with the president of the company, let alone have him show up and want to take a drive. I knew something was up. Carl told me he wanted to give me a new opportunity as the manager at the Ridgeway location.

My immediate reaction was shock, but I was also very grateful because they recognized all the work I had done. Ridgeway was a smaller yard at the time and had some challenges and opportunities to grow. We tackled those challenges and continued to grow year after year, and I’ve been here around twenty years. We built a new warehouse and remerchandised the store. The business continued to grow, whether that was related to local economic growth or our close relationship with customers. Other lumber yards closed over the years and

we inherited their customers. There has been a consistently positive set of outcomes.

Ridgeway is a small village in Fort Erie in Niagara Region. It is a bedroom and retirement community. Lots of people move out here to retire. There’s also lots of new people who have moved in from the city to take advantage of a quieter lifestyle. The local Business Improvement Association has been growing and doing some wonderful things to revitalize the community.

We have lots of long-time customers; the Sider brothers, Rick Stewart, Bob Cosby of Black Creek Building, to name a few. Turkstra Lumber at Ridgeway is technically a lumber yard but is also more like the local hardware store in town. All sorts of people come to us with all sorts of needs. We’re like the go-to people in town when you have a building or renovation project, need hardware or supplies, or expert advice on different issues. We have lots of customers and accounts that have been with us for many years. And they keep coming back because they know and trust us.

It’s been a pleasure to work and grow with Turkstra all these years and I look forward to helping the company grow into the future!



Hilery Burlie (née Turkstra) – Customer Service

I started working with my dad, Jack Turkstra, for around five years right out of high school in the early 1980s at his business, J.R.'s Hardware. Ivan Bazuin was (and continues to be) the manager at the Stoney Creek location. I have fond memories of these early days. Everything was hand-written back then. We had to figure out deposits with an old-school calculator, crank out the receipts and pencil-in spreadsheets. Invoices and purchase orders had carbon copies that we had to lock in a walk-in safe at night until we had computers to back up daily sales.

I worked with Dad purchasing the hardware. We had to price and label everything with an old label machine. I also worked in the pallet division for a brief

time, helping purchase doors, spruce lumber, plywood, pressure-treated lumber and trim. A lot of this arrived by rail to the Stoney Creek yard and was distributed to the other branches. I remember smoking was allowed in the office and the air could get rather heavy at times!

I've had the privilege of working under all three generations of Turkstras. The business went through some tough times in the 1980s and early 1990s. Things were booming and then suddenly hit a standstill. I didn't know if I had a job coming out of high school due to the economy. Those were some scary times.

Uncle Peter was a wonderful man. He could be tough, but he had a big heart. Many employees called him "P.T.," and I would sometimes call him "Gramps"

because he was like a grandfather to me. He was technically my uncle, but since there was a big age difference between him and my dad, he seemed more like a grandfather figure. He would give a handshake for a deal, whereas now everything must be on paper.

I recall one time the phone rang in the Stoney Creek branch after the store had just closed. It was a contractor who needed skylights on his roof. Uncle Peter turned to me and said, "Write me a bill. I'm going out there to deliver it to him." He packed the skylights in his car and delivered them that night. He used to drive an old Cadillac and would sometimes travel with my dad. It was like an office on wheels. You never knew what was coming down the pipe when those two pulled into the parking lot!

At Christmas time, Dad and Uncle Peter would hand-deliver bonuses to all the branches. They still do that today, which I think is nice to make that personal connection. My dad was a good complement to Uncle Peter

and cousin Carl in the running of the business. He was very well-respected, loved and his faith was very evident. People gravitated to him. Employees, contractors, everyone just loved him. To work under him as a teenager was a real privilege. He was really very good at making personal connections, and was also very down-to-earth. He would say to me, "You know, just because you are family doesn't guarantee you a job here. In fact, you must work twice as hard because people will always be watching you."

Years after my dad passed, I brought his work jacket into the Stoney Creek location. He would wear a dress shirt and pants, but he was always getting dirty. He was known to wear this white doctor jacket so when he was in the warehouse he could work away and take it off if he had another meeting. The jacket is stained with ink and a little roughed up, but it

Jack Turktra and his jacket



always smelled of lumber. In fact, whenever I smell lumber one of the first things I think about is Dad. The jacket now hangs in a frame in the boardroom at the Stoney Creek location; a little piece of Turkstra Lumber history for people to enjoy.

I think one of the many reasons Turkstra Lumber has been around so long is effective management. Uncle Peter, Carl, and Peter are all different, but they are good at managing change under challenging circumstances and have always had good support behind them. They care about their employees and each generation has brought different values and perspectives to the table that has enabled the business to thrive. You can feel these values when you're there. It's an excellent work environment and people know that.

Christmas is always a special time at Turkstra Lumber. I remember one Christmas party, we crowned King Carl and Prince Peter. Carl had a red cape and wooden scepter and Peter had a plunger. We printed "King Carl" dollars you could redeem to get a drink at the party. The parties were always very fun. Even in the early days, it was all about putting on a good dinner and making sure they were giving back to the community, whether through the Christmas Tree of Hope or another

charity.

There has always been a strong employer-employee relationship at Turkstra. If an employee is in crisis or in need, Uncle Peter, Carl or Peter would reach out to see how they could help. They're just good people. You don't see that too often. You don't see the kind of dedication from presidents of companies who step up and take an interest in the welfare of their employees and the community. And they don't do it for a pat on the back either. Often, people don't even know about the charity and philanthropy because it's done quietly. But it shows they've got very big hearts.

Carl and Peter graciously hired me back part-time after I got married and had a family. Over the years, I've worked at several locations and with many great managers and staff but ended up at the Dundas location. I love being on the front line, seeing contractors I knew way back and getting to know new customers. I still learn something new every day.

The reputation of the business isn't just about the motto "Always on the Level." It's about performing that value in the everyday work of the business. Frankly, the service someone gets with us is miles ahead of any of the big box competitors. We don't just stand in one section. We wear many hats and staff can talk competently about windows, doors, trim,



or plumbing. For most people, once they make the connection and they see how different we are, they come back. We've never been open Sundays, partly out of respect for our employees, a fact which is respected by many.

When I started at Turkstra Lumber, we weighed nails and screws by the pound. Although we get them pre-packaged from the wholesaler, we make a point of continuing to weigh them out for sale by the pound. We have scales that are checked regularly to make sure they're measuring correctly—so they are literally “on the level” when we sell them!



Gary Neven – Neven Custom Homes

Neven Construction celebrated its 65th anniversary in 2017. My grandfather George Neven started the company in 1952. My grandfather left the Netherlands after the Second World War in 1949, as many Dutch immigrants did. He came to Canada to look for new opportunities and a better way of life. They settled in the Hamilton area because there was a growing Dutch community here. There was the draw of the church. Many Christian Reformed people settled in similar areas, so they could work together as a community and help each other out.

The Turkstras were already in the area and somehow my grandfather and Peter Turkstra crossed paths. My grandfather bought a lot of his materials from Turkstra

pretty much from the day they opened. He was a fishing buddy of Peter Sr.

George Neven started out working for a contractor when he arrived in Canada and three years later he started his own business. He focused on doing renovations and building a few homes. We've continued pretty much along the same path. The only difference is the company is slightly bigger now. We have more and different opportunities. We're able to build a lot higher-end custom-built homes. There are people with larger disposable incomes so we're building a much more luxurious home than my grandfather ever did.

I started working part-time in the 1980s when I was in university, and full-time with my dad, Andy, in 1990. In 1994, I started my own company. Until then, it was Neven

Construction Limited. In 1994, I started Neven Custom Homes Limited, and in 1996, my dad officially retired from the home-building business.

The early 1990s were some tough years. I remember around 1992-93 there were some years where we had employees making more money than us as owners. It was tough to get work. I remember thinking how I had spent four years in university and then enduring this constant struggle. I asked myself, "Where is the reward?"

"Why are we doing this?" I asked my dad one day.

"Don't worry, son. Better years will come," he told me.

Better years did come. Since the late 1990s, we have had twenty good years where the economy has just continued to grow in the construction sector. There have been more opportunities as more people with higher disposable incomes build luxury homes.

We have stuck by Turkstra Lumber all these years because we have a solid relationship. They are honest and have integrity. You can count on their word, which is key in our business. What's important for us is good service and getting good material at a fair price. The best price isn't the most important, it's getting it at a fair price, and the

dependability of getting it when it's been promised to you. We have found Turkstra has been very reliable and dependable in that regard.

We also like the fact that the company has grown their product lines and number of branches. My grandfather dealt more with the Hamilton yard when he started, my dad typically dealt with the Waterdown yard, and I deal more with the Dundas yard. It is extremely convenient having a yard close to where we are working.

I remember one time in the early 1990s. I went into the Dundas yard to pick up an order of wood trim. There was this young guy wearing blue coveralls with the name "Harry" printed on the chest. It was a cold fall day and he was wearing a toque and gloves. He looked at my order and said, "Yeah, I'm new here. I really have no idea what most of this stuff is. Can you help me find it?" We went around and had some fun trying to find the matching codes to the products I was looking for.

I asked a few questions about who he was and how long he'd been there. He told me his name was Peter and his dad, Carl, was president of the company and wanted Peter to experience and understand different areas of the company, including the truss plant, the yard, and in the store behind the counter. From that time

forward, Peter and I have stayed in touch and have become quite close friends.

My dad had more relationships with the branch managers, guys like Andy Regnerus, former manager of the Waterdown yard. My dad had a lot of respect for J.R.—Jack Turkstra. He knew him well. He really respected him as a man of integrity, an honest and godly man. For those reasons my dad enjoyed spending time chatting with him. I remember my dad talking about a slogan Turkstra had at the Stoney Creek office. It said something along the lines of, “God is the unseen witness and participant of every transaction.” It shows how important their faith was to them. My grandfather and Peter Sr. were very Christian men and they built both companies on Christian values. And that has carried on to our generation. I remember Peter Sr. at one of his official retirement parties, saying “I’ve never really been that involved with an orphanage.” Even then, he wanted to give something to the charity. He really was quite an incredible person.

We have participated alongside Turkstra Lumber in different community initiatives. We’ve done food share programs and support

Redeemer College University in Ancaster. Peter Sr. was quite instrumental in helping Redeemer get started. When Redeemer looked to build a library, a contact through my dad approached Carl Turkstra. They needed to raise five million dollars and wanted to name the library after Peter Sr., who had already passed away at this point. Carl went after all his suppliers and various builders, ourselves included, and was responsible for raising one million dollars towards that building.

With Turkstra Lumber, it comes down to their slogan of being “Always on the Level.” Integrity, honesty, and family values. I’ve admired the fact they have chosen not to be open on Sunday, from a family perspective. Most of their competitors are open on Sundays, but it is a business decision they’ve chosen. I think they’ve realized the toll that work can take on families and I’ve admired them for decisions like that. They have good, caring staff.

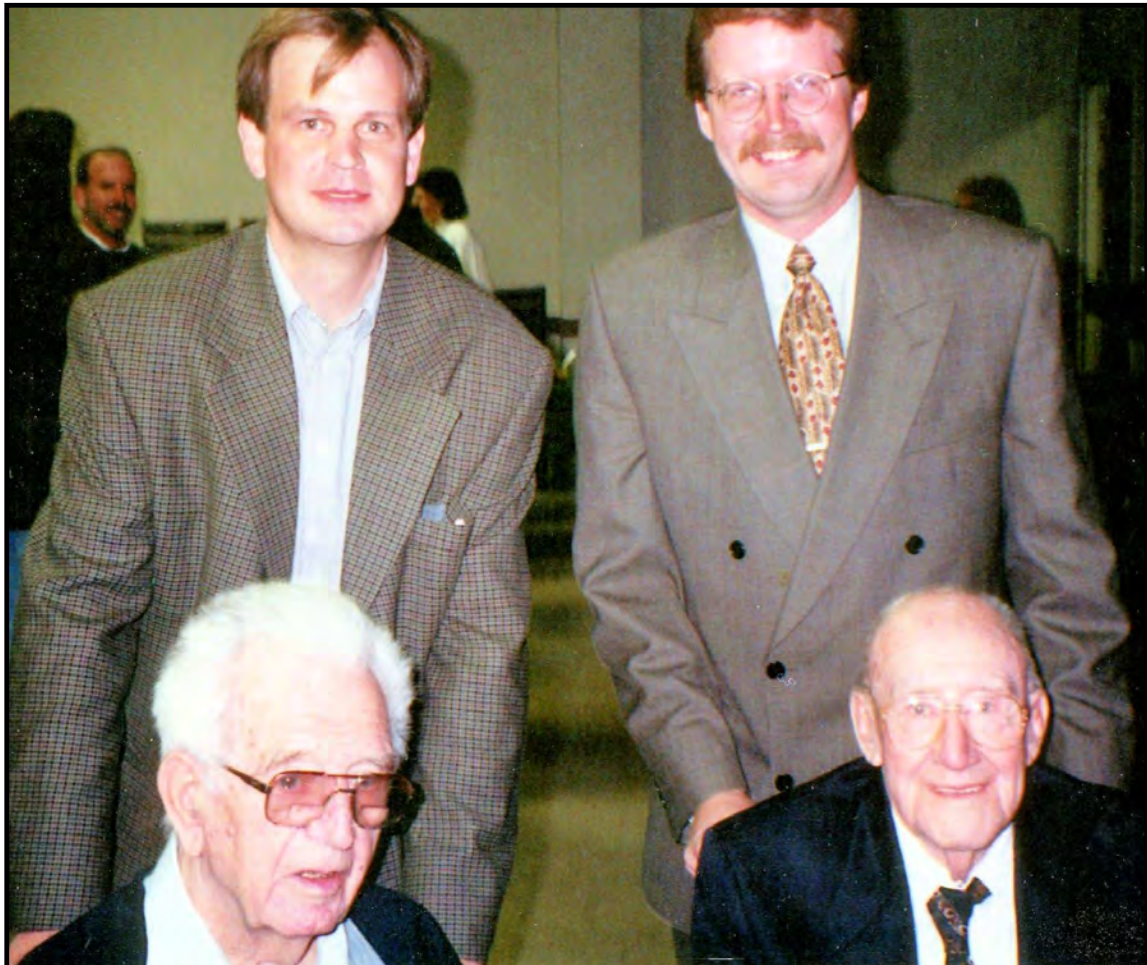
How long employees stick around tells you a lot about a company. People like Rick Dymont, Dundas branch manager, salesmen like Rick Vandervelde, Will Wiebenga, and the designers in the truss division. They have many people who have been there for a long time. They’re not jumping around from one employer to another or one job to another. As a

customer, it signals that Turkstra Lumber looks after their employees and their staff very well. We all need some lead time. You can't expect them to drop everything. They've got customers and commitments to other

people. But in a pinch when I call — "Hey, we're short a bunch of sheets of plywood or whatever" — I know they would do their best to fit it in and get it to you within a few hours.

When they make a commitment, you can count on it and you know you won't have guys standing around costing money because the required materials didn't show up. In our line of work, every job is a potential disaster if we didn't have the kind of reliability we get at Turkstra Lumber.

Standing: Peter Turkstra, Gary Neven. Seated: Peter Turkstra, George Neven





Andy Neven – Neven Construction Limited

Before Turkstra Lumber started, my father, George Neven, originally dealt with another lumber yard in Dundas. Someone from Turkstra approached my father and he started doing business with them instead. He always tried to support Christian businesses and they also had good service. My father became a close friend of Peter Sr. They used to go up to northern Ontario and Quebec together quite often to buy lumber and go fishing.

In the mid-1970s, they were about to open their Stoney Creek location and they needed a manager. Peter Sr., my father and I were up north at a cottage in the Honey Harbour area. Peter wanted me to be the manager. He

asked me if I was interested. I said I was because our business wasn't doing great at the time. We made a living but that was it, and it was hardly enough for two families.

We talked a few more times and Peter came to me one day. "I want to offer you the job."

I thought long and hard about it and decided I couldn't leave my father George because he was at a stage where he couldn't run the business on his own. I told Peter, "I'm sorry, thanks for the offer but I can't do this. I can't leave my father alone."

I think it turned out better for the both



of us because I don't think I could have run the Stoney Creek yard anyway because it grew rapidly.

I went back to my father and told him, "Peter offered me the job, but I feel I can't take it."

A week later, my father came back to me and said, "You know what? Then I quit." His health wasn't that good, and I never knew how he made it financially, but we all survived, and the business grew over the years.

Our business stayed small until my son Gary started full-time in the 1990s. When he started, there was quite a downturn in the economy. Looking back, it was probably good because it taught him how things don't come easily. If he was a young guy starting out and everything was going great, he might not have learned that lesson. We had a five-year plan and then my health kind of went so I had to pull back. At the end of five years it worked out well and Gary was ready to take over.

I'm very glad we stayed with Turkstra Lumber over the years. They've always given good service and treated us very well. And that's reflected well on our business too.



Ben van Hoeve – Van Hoeve Homes

I learned how to build homes from my dad, Jan (John) van Hoeve. He was originally from the Netherlands and immigrated in the early 1950s to Alberta. He connected with people he knew from his area back home and settled into a farming community. My dad never wanted to be a farmer, so in the mid-1950s when his kinfolk moved to the Chatham, Ontario area where many other Dutch farmers were living, he decided to move to Hamilton where he started a landscaping company on the Hamilton Mountain.

Working as a landscaper, Dad was often in close contact with homebuilders. He knew the surveyor A.J. Clarke, who told me about dad's journey watching these other

guys building houses and saying, "Oh, I could do that too." In 1964, my dad started van Hoeve Construction Ltd. with my mom, Martina, working in the office.

Of course, being part of the big, but tight-knit Dutch community in Hamilton, my dad and Peter Sr. eventually connected. They went to different churches, but given they were in a similar line of work it was inevitable they would develop a connection. Peter's brother Harold was a mechanic and owned Westmount Garage on Main Street West in Hamilton.

Not long after Turkstra Lumber was established, Peter Sr. and my dad were involved in starting some land development companies. There were several entrepreneurial guys involved, people like John Spiegelaar, the realtor Ray Edwards,

Karl Heisey and Murray Hogarth—who started Pioneer Gas together, the Leggatts—who started car dealerships in Burlington. They all worked together on buying and developing pieces of land for houses, subdivisions and the like. Peter Sr. had lots of connections and he was not shy about asking people if they were interested in getting involved.

John van Hoeve (my dad), Ray Edwards, and Peter Sr. even started their own company in the late 1960s or early 1970s, called JET Developments (for “John Edwards Turkstra”). I recall one piece of land in Dundas my dad bought next to the Dundas Driving Park in the 1970s that took around twenty-five years to develop. He couldn’t get the approval and permits to do anything with the land. By that time, Peter Sr. had retired, and my dad had died in 1979, so it was Carl Turkstra and myself who finally developed the land. I helped with a few other land development pieces in west Hamilton and Dundas as well.

I remember being an eighteen-year old, tagging along with my dad on Saturdays to build houses. I took Engineering at McMaster University, but worked through the summers with my dad. I had taken over the family business with my mom when my dad died in 1979, and JET Developments pulled me in because of my dad’s connection. They used me as their ground development guy, doing all the legwork with the Region of Hamilton-Wentworth (later City of Hamilton), attending council meetings and that sort of thing. It was a wonderful opportunity to get my feet wet in development work. I remember working

out in Stoney Creek developing subdivisions. We ended up developing five or six small subdivisions and selling them to builders.

But I came in at the tail end when I graduated from McMaster in 1982 when all these guys were starting to wind down and think about retirement. Business was also becoming more difficult with an economic recession and big land developers—Greenpark, Mattamy and others—coming into Hamilton by the early 1980s and buying up big tracts of land. When I took over the construction business in the early 1980s, we were only building a few homes a year. Our busiest years were in the later 1990s and early 2000s when we were building up to twenty-three homes a year.

I ended up working almost directly for Turkstra Lumber at one point. I helped with the expansion of the Waterdown branch in the 1980s. I helped organize and build the Dunnville location. We refurbished the Stoney Creek yard at one point. It was a loose arrangement, but Peter Sr. would call me in to help with these sorts of things. I worked with J.R. (Jack) Turkstra at one point too doing some framing and various projects on the fly when he was running the hardware business.

We have always been customers of Turkstra Lumber from the beginning and we’ve always had a good relationship because our families were connected. My dad had all these land development connections with Peter Sr., and Herman Turkstra (Peter Sr.’s eldest son) was our family lawyer. I did some development work with Carl Turkstra. We maintain these ties down through the generations.

Peter Sr. literally took me under his wing. He didn’t have to do it, but he did. He did that

similarly with other people too. I think he had a soft spot for the underdog, whether it was someone fighting city hall or helping people with financial difficulties. He would sit down and make sure it was a win/win situation. He really made sure he lived out his faith.

It's probably in my nature to be loyal. I have the same relationship with different tradesmen who are on their third generation working for me. I feel, if there is a good rapport, I continue to be loyal. I don't feel it has become harder to be loyal considering all the changes in the construction industry over time. In fact, when people have been with you for so long and you can count on their loyalty, it's easier to do the job right.

For me, Turkstra Lumber is different in terms of their attention to customer service. They do try to accommodate customers' needs and I've always felt that. It's also easy to feel that loyalty and friendship we've developed over the years. I've always had a good rapport with the sales people and different branch managers. Even when there's been conflict or tension, it's always been resolved and there was a real commitment to resolving problems. It makes me feel good about our working relationship and it has reflected well on our company.

We both understand the importance of local reputation and we will continue to grow together. We also have similar values and approach. I'm not after the last nickel on the job. It's more about developing relationships, so it's nice to work with a company that understands that. I value companies that have the same value system as I do, and it inspires me to bring that into how we operate and how we treat people.

