

Lyle Shantz Hallman



Lyle Hallman was just 9-years-old when his father's construction business was devastated by the Depression. After losing their home, the family moved eight times as his father bought old houses and refurbished them before reselling them for a small profit.

His mother helped out by baking pies, forty or fifty at a time, and selling them.

So when Hallman started his own construction business in 1945 with only \$750, he knew the hard work and risk that lay ahead. At the time of his death in 2003, Hallman had amassed a fortune as a builder, developer and landlord. He is perhaps best known, however, for the money - more than \$15 million - that he gave away.

"I'm making a pile of money every year," he said. "I know I can't take it with me, and my family will never starve, so why not give some back."

As a child Hallman watched his devout Mennonite parents give one-tenth of their income to the church. Regardless of the economic hardship they endured, they continued to tithe.

He carried on his parents' tradition and expanded on it by giving money away to local organizations that helped promote education and health. His largest single donation was \$6.5 million for the Lyle S. Hallman Institute for Health Promotion at the University of Waterloo. He also gave \$3 million to a campaign for the redevelopment of Waterloo Region's three hospitals. He donated \$1.5 million to establish the Lyle S. Hallman Chair in Child and Family Welfare at Wilfrid Laurier University.

Hallman's charitable focus was often children, believing that once they are adults they have more choices. "Before that time they can be swung one way or another and I want to help provide them with the opportunity to make the right choices in their lives," he said.

Hallman started renovating stores in Kitchener after the Second World War and moved on to building houses. By the late 1950s he was buying farms and in the 1960s he began constructing apartment buildings.

By 2003, he and his wife sold the 3,000 rental units in 63 buildings they owned in a

multi-million dollar deal that went down as one of the biggest real estate transactions in the region's history. Hallman described the sale as "a very successful ending to something I've been involved in for a lot of my life."

His buildings were not luxurious but they were clean and well maintained. Despite his wealth, Hallman lived in one of his own modest Waterloo buildings for more than twenty years.

His family was always involved - his wife Wendy Hallman worked in the business for many years and ran the property management side of things. Their children followed in their parents' footsteps, becoming builders, property managers and retirement home operators.

Lyle Hallman died in a car accident in 2003 on a Sunday morning on his way to church in New Dundee. During his life, he was honoured with the Order of Canada, the Canada 125 medal and an honorary doctorate from the University of Waterloo.

Photo courtesy of the Waterloo Chronicle.