

## Celebrating Ted Clear

Theodore "Ted" E. Clear passed away peacefully on October 1, 2019. In 1946, he married his only love since junior high school, Mary Louise (Saurber) Clear.

Clear's daughter, Lisa Schaffer, said Clear was forward-thinking from a young age. Clear's younger years were during the Great Depression and to help take of his family, he raised rabbits and sold them to the local restaurants. He also carried a burlap sack to school and collected coal that had fallen from railroad cars.

By the age of 14, Clear had learned to fly and had gained his pilot's license. In 1943, at age 17, he enlisted in the Army Air Corps. He was honorably discharged in 1946. After his service, Clear returned home to run his father's company, Sherman T. Clear Plastering, where he worked for 28 years.

In 1970, Clear invented and patented the process for concrete backer board and commercially produced the original Wonderboard® for Modulars, Inc. Schaffer pointed out that the invention of the concrete backer board came out of necessity. Before Clear's invention, residential showers were reserved for the wealthy because the process to create them was quite time-consuming. "Coming out of World War II, there were a lot of production homes," she said. "You didn't see the bathroom you see today because it was so exorbitantly expensive [to tile]. It was very much a hand process; it was time-consuming. You weren't just talking weeks. Sometimes it took a couple of months to

actually set everything up," Schaffer explained. She said the concrete backer board allowed the average homeowner to have the luxurious bathrooms we see today.

Mark Albonetti, PROVA Installation & Technical Specialist and family friend, emphasized what Clear's invention meant to the industry. "It is by far the single most important thing for our tile history," he said. "We wouldn't be anywhere close to where we are today if wasn't for the mass production – not just the invention – of backer board. The ability to mass produce changed the industry forever. Any improvements today, such as foam boards and underlayments, would not have even happened if it wasn't for the backer board and the process being invented; it just wouldn't."

Albonetti said when the concrete backer board first became available, he had his doubts about the product. He thought the product was a radical concept that would never work. Albonetti first tried the new product one winter in order to avoid having to heat the sand that was normally mixed with cement to make mortar. Once he saw how much time the product saved, sometimes several days, he began to use it regularly.

Clear's company became Fin-Pan, Inc. in 1975. Schaffer said her family chose the company's name after Clear said he didn't want the company named after him and made his goal for the product clear. "He stated the goal as 'I want to be able to make a finished panel that



you can use to not only put inside your home but outside your home as well."

After working on other thin concrete applications, Clear formed the T. Clear Corporation, which produced building products that are energy efficient. This company was named after Clear much against his objections. "He didn't want the company named after him. But he let the employees name it and that's what they named it," Schaffer said.

When it came to his employees, Clear made it a point to know the people who worked for him. He had an open-door policy and invited anyone to come talk to him about anything. He also walked the plants daily, making sure to know more than just his employees' names; he also knew about their spouses, children and circumstances. In the rise of company benefits, he also strived to offer his employees the best benefits the company could afford.

While at TSP, Schaffer talked to many people about her father and their memories of him. One of the common themes she heard was how great and fun he was.

NTCA Executive Director Bart Bettiga remembers Clear and his wife as being fixtures in the industry, active at many industry events. He also said Fin-Pan's creative sponsorships of industry events opened the door for many other smaller companies to do the same. "I have known Ted Clear for more than 30 years, and spent many wonderful times with him in both CTDA and NTCA conferences and trade shows," Bettiga said. "Ted's company, Fin-Pan, was a longtime supporter of our training and education programs, and numerous times even hosted events at their facility as well as their distributor customers. Ted was a pioneer in our

industry and his contributions in technology made a direct impact on our market growth. Ted will be sorely missed."

Clear was inducted into the Ceramic Tile Distribution Association (CTDA) Hall of Fame in 2000. The award recognizes outstanding CTDA and industry leaders.

Beyond his work in the industry, Clear enjoyed flying airplanes, hunting, fishing, and collecting Model "A" vehicles. He helped to start Duck Unlimited and Pheasants Forever in Southern Ohio. He was involved in many quiet philanthropic endeavors, always giving back to his church/faith, community, industry and his natural environment. His company often donated materials for mission efforts overseas and to hurricane relief efforts in Haiti.

When asked about Clear's legacy, Albonetti quickly said he thought Clear changed the tile business singer," he said. "The songs are still there; the movies are still there. Ted will always be there because even though backer board is changing there wouldn't be a foam board...if there hadn't been a Wonderboard."

Schaffer agreed, adding, "My dad's legacy is the love and passion for his industry and his family."

*Clear was also remembered for his suspenders. He had dozens that he had collected from all over the world while traveling with his wife. "I think most people remember Ted for his suspenders," said Mark Albonetti. "That was his trademark."*

