

Remembering... Orville George Mead, 1938–2002

Born a country boy in South Gleenelg, Orville Mead went on to become known as “Mr. Furniture” in the Durham Community. An extremely faithful Durhamite, he spent a lifetime of long hours promoting his community and the furniture industry. It is said: Orville claimed he decided at a very early age he wasn’t going to shovel manure all his life. Those who knew Orville often said, when he made up his mind to do something, he did it. His endless list of achievements is proof.

Orville was born on a farm in South Gleenelg, son of Mr. and Mrs. Earl Mead. There were four children in the family. He received his elementary and secondary education in the Durham Community. During his time of employment with Kroehler Manufacturing, Orville attended the University of Waterloo two

nights a week to further his education. Orville married Ann McNab in 1956. They had one boy and three girls.

Following his marriage he lived in Toronto, working for the Royal Bank and had several part-time jobs, driving a taxi and stacking groceries. After being laid off by the bank, he went to work for Peel Construction, spending nearly a year working near Wawa on the Trans Canada Highway. Early in 1959, he was playing hockey and had the misfortune of breaking his arm so severely that it was in a cast for eight months. Needless to say, his truck driving days were over. In April of that year his notable career in the furniture business started. He joined Kroehler Manufacturing in Durham as Product Cost Accountant. Two years later he was Industrial Engineering Manager, continuing through management

positions, becoming Vice President in 1979 and President in 1983.

As Mr. Mead moved up the corporate chain, he became more involved in furniture associations. He served as president of both the Ontario and Canadian Furniture Associations. When Orville was President of the Canadian Furniture Association, the furniture industry was not doing very well. He was requested to appear before a House Senate Committee to plead the industry’s case. When questioned later about his success before the committee, Orville, in his quiet sense of humour, replied, “I thought I was doing a good job until I noticed one of the senators asleep”. Orville travelled to many parts of the world and hundreds of hours behind the wheel, promoting the Canadian furniture industry and the thousands of products it produced. His tireless efforts were very successful to the industry as a whole and to his employer.

As plant manager at Kroehler Manufacturing, he knew every employee by name and in many cases he grew up with them. He was very supportive of his work force, knowing if they were happy, the result would be a quality product. In 1992 the Durham Community was shocked to learn the holding



company of Kroehler Manufacturing, Strathern House Group, had gone bankrupt, hauling down the local plant with it and throwing the entire work force out of work.

Within a short period of time, a group was formed in a determined effort to put the plant back in operation. Durham Furniture became a reality, overcoming many hurdles as it began with a small work force. The new CEO of the new company was Orville Mead who was more determined than ever to make it work. The struggling company became successful under Orville’s driving force. Unfortunately, in 2001 Orville Mead retired due to a serious health problem. His passing a year later left a huge void in the Durham Community.

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