

If ever a man was "self made", Halvor Halvorson probably fills the bill.

An immigrant from Sweden at the age of two, Halvorson came to Washington's Inland Empire in 1947 with, as he says, "nobody and no dollars."

He founded what became a 200 million dollar construction company, supported more community projects than even his biographer --- if he had one --- could count, and has played a major role in development of The Evergreen State College.

Raised in St. Paul, Halvorson studied engineering at the University of Minnesota, worked for his father, a contractor, for a few years, then served in field artillery during World War II.

After the war he and his bride, the former Rudella (Mickey) Mikelson, settled with their first born in Spokane. "It looked like a good place to live and start a business," he recalls.

A dozen years and four children later, Halvorson made the business pages of his adopted hometown newspaper as president of a "nationally known construction company," H. Halvorson, Incorporated.

As president and general manager of the corporation, Halvorson oversaw development of the company which was, by 1957, doing business from Fairbanks, Alaska to Santa Barbara, California, from Seattle to Minot, North Dakota. Eventually, the business expanded to serve more than two dozen western states --- building banks, churches, shopping centers, hospitals, hotels and schools.

His firm constructed Spokane's new air terminal, Seattle's Shoreline High School, and San Francisco's Letterman Hospital, which was the largest on-site precast concrete construction project in the country when it was built in 1967.

That same year, the company had completed more than 350 construction projects with a total value of more than 200 million dollars. It has also received national recognition for constructing the Tecolote Tunnel, a 6.4 mile-long straight bore which carries water from Cachuma Lake through the Santa Ynez Mountains to

Santa Barbara County. The 14-million-dollar task was an awesomely difficult undertaking and took six years to complete. The company has since been sited by the Washington Public Power Supply System for its role in construction of what was in 1965 the world's largest nuclear powered steam plant, Hanford Number One, near Richland, Washington.

By 1967, the company's president was also receiving personal recognition. Governor Daniel J. Evans had called him to ask if he would accept appointment to the Board of Trustees of Evergreen, a college without site, buildings, or faculty.

Halvorson readily accepted the appointment, offering his experience as a member of Pacific Lutheran University's board of trustees for five years, and his considerable expertise in construction.

"In the beginning, being a trustee for Evergreen was very difficult," he says. "We didn't meet until the middle of September (1967) and we had less than three months to select a site and get the college going."

Halvorson was asked to chair the site selection committee which worked closely with local citizens and finally narrowed possible locations to the present site on nearly 1,000 acres of the Cooper Point Peninsula, five miles northwest of Olympia.

"We really were fortunate to find a site so large and so close to Olympia," he says. "We only had to move three families from a total of 67 parcels of land and we felt the site's proximity to Olympia and the state legislature was a real bonus."

Halvorson expresses excitement about his involvement with Evergreen but voices a trustee's concerns for its future.

"The college is making available to its students an educational concept or service, if you will, that no other colleges are providing," he says. "We teaching students to be part of their own governance and to become better men and women."

He's disappointed, though, that the college is not able to invite more

students to enroll. "We should be able to offer Evergreen's programs to more students that we are," he says.

"I think our legislators can be convinced to fund us for more students," the Spokaneite adds. He admits the task of convincing them will be a tough one. An active politician himself, Halvorson thinks the solution lies with Evergreen's students. "I think our students are more oriented to government than those of other colleges," he smiles, "and I feel Evergreen will, in due time, enjoy a greatly expanded student body as the values of the Evergreen concept become more evident."

Though Halvorson says he thinks Evergreen's program is "exactly right" for the needs of today's students, he wishes the new college had a better relationship with its home county community.

"I wish we had created an advisory board of local citizens to help us as we were creating the college," he says. "We considered it, but the idea was never implemented. I still think we could involve more Thurston County citizens in shaping the direction of the school."

One idea Halvorson has for encouraging greater community support for Evergreen is competitive sports.

"I'm one trustee who does support a competitive athletics program," he says. "Because I really do feel it would be a positive force in the community, and it would help keep the alumni interested in the college."

In its four-year history, Evergreen has not participated in competitive athletics, but has, instead, encouraged intramural or individualistic sports programs. However, Halvorson thinks the students would support development of competitive teams in "the least expensive sports --- like basketball, track, tennis and golf."

Halvorson also voices concerns for what he sees as Evergreen's tendency to "react to problems too much.

"We've got to solve problems before we're forced to react to them," he insists.

The construction magnate says he hears "really good things" from students and parents in the Spokane area who are involved with Evergreen and feels strongly that the college is "one of the finest in the Northwest."

One reason for Evergreen's success, he says, is its lack of faculty tenure.

"I think it's one of our big pluses," he adds. "Our instructors are on three-year contracts and they have to perform or be released."

So far there have been few terminations of college faculty at Evergreen because, he thinks, "our instructors were drawn from a pool of 20,000 applicants and those who hired them did an incredible job of selection."

With Evergreen's last major facility now under construction, Halvorson sees no change in his role as a decision maker for Evergreen.

"In the beginning, it was important to Governor Evans to have a contractor on the board, one who would see to it that money was spent wisely," he says. "But," he adds, "there's only five of us on the board and we've all been involved in everything."

Halvorson has, indeed been involved in everything --- and not only at Evergreen, where he was recently appointed to his second term on the board.

But, the Spokane contractor and father of five has also founded two travel bureaus in his home city, serves as a director for the Old National Bank of Washington and for Bancshares Mortgage Company, is Chairman of the Advisory Committee for the City of Spokane's Coliseum/Stadium, and belongs to or has served on numerous other community organizations and activities.

He sums up his personal success --- and that of the new college in Olympia which received full academic accreditation in three years instead of the traditional four --- simply.

"There is no secret to these successes," he says. "just hard work."