Bill Carroll

So what does it mean, really, to be a Lifetime Member of the Association of the Wall and Ceiling Industries-International? Is it some kind of recognition given by AWCI to members who are about to fade into the sunset?

Not quite. In fact, just the opposite is true. The idea came from a member in what turned out to be a successful attempt to keep the association from fading into the sunset.

The best person to talk to about this idea is the man who thought of it—Bill Carroll, chairman of Carroll Ventures, Inc., Albuquerque, N.M.
“When times were good, there were a lot of contractors in the association, and dues were paid,” Carroll recalls. “But when times were bad, dues were not paid. The association was hitting some hard times. The trouble was a shortage of funds. The association was on the verge of collapse.”

Carroll felt that AWCI had been good to a number of contractors, himself included, and he was trying to figure out a way they could keep the association going. An outright gift didn’t seem practical for a number of reasons. Finally, he hit upon the idea of lifetime membership.

The thought was to have enough contractors—not too few, not too many, maybe somewhere between 60 and 100—donate $8,000 apiece. The interest on this money would pay the contractors’ annual dues through their lifetime. But the principal would be there when the association really needed it, to prevent a cashflow catastrophe, especially when this cyclic industry hit its periodic downturns. Carroll put all kinds of restrictions on the money, such as requiring 75 percent of the AWCI board of directors to approve taking it, so that it really was a safety net. The board liked the idea and gave it unanimous approval. Carroll recalls that these emergency funds “were gutted at least twice,” but the association paid them back. The association is solvent now—and has been for some time. So, while the lifetime membership continues, the grim necessity that brought the concept into being is now a part of history.

A Major Player

Lifetime membership is only one aspect of the history of the wall and ceiling industry...
Carroll took over the family business when he was only 19 years old.

in general and AWCI in particular in which Carroll played a pioneering role. He accompanied three of AWCI’s leaders to Chicago to get funding for the new idea to form the Foundation of the Wall and Ceiling Industry—from Inland Steel Company and Donn Products. In 1982, Carroll was given the McNulty Award for research and technology that advanced the industry for his innovative prefabrication work. In 1987, Carroll earned the Pinnacle Award, the association’s top award. When asked why he was so recognized, Carroll replies, “for a lot of hard work and dedication to the industry.”

A fitting understatement. Between 1953 and 1995, Carroll missed only three AWCI conventions. He continually served on so many of AWCI’s committees that he can’t even begin to remember them all. He’s often been active on the board of directors and also chaired numerous committees. “One of the most enjoyable things I’ve ever done in my life is attended at least 12 trips of the Continuing Study Committee, traveling all over the world,” Carroll says. He also was active on that committee for many years, including chairing it.

Carroll also was president of AWCI in
formed to keep out that new upstart—drywall. But that organization was phased out when its members gradually started hanging drywall. And, when Carroll became president of this association, it was the last year it was called CPLIA. After a few more versions, it was then simplified into the name it is known by today—AWCI.

Almost every trade association has to work hard to attract members. Those who dedicate their time and talent to become industry leaders are a rare breed. What was it within Carroll that ignited his dedication at such an early stage of his career? A good place to start is in the beginning.

**Take It from the Top**

Carroll was born the son of a plasterer, Will Carroll. When he was a very young boy, his mother died while giving birth to his younger brother, Roy (Boy would later work for his older brother for several years, before he went out on his own.) Single fathers did not have daycare centers back in those days, so young Bill’s sand pile was a construction site. He grew up during the hard times of the Depression and started working at a very young age. “Everything had wood
then, so there was a lot of sweeping to do,” he recalls. “I worked for 12.5 cents per hour, or $1 a day.”

He started doing the heavy work as a hod carrier when he was 16. It made him strong, so much so that, after graduating from high school in 1947, he had a stint playing shortstop for a minor
league team of the Boston Red Sox.

At 18, right out of high school, he married his wife, Charlotte, and they’re still together today after 52 years.

In 1950, when his father died unexpectedly at age 49, Carroll, at age 19, took over the business.

Naturally, it was a struggle to take on so many adult responsibilities at so young an age. But he did have a high school diploma, a gift for numbers, and had taken drafting so he could read blueprints. He also had learned a trade from literally the ground up, and had been imbued with his father work ethic—or, perhaps, workaholic ethic.

Charlotte did the bookkeeping, but the first 10 years, he recalls, “The amount of work that had to be done was unbelievable.” For at least the first five or six years, he would spend all day on the scaffolds with the crew, then load the truck and move the scaffold and mixer to the next site so it would be ready the next morning at about 6:30. During this time, he was getting home at about 9 or 10 p.m.

Carroll’s dad had been a small residential plasterer, with never more than five employees. But Carroll eventually had up to 300 people working for him. The key change came in the mid-1950s when he began doing commercial work. He opened an office in Denver where he did many jobs, including several for the Airforce Academy, then opened another office in Dallas where he did the Dallas Regional County Building and many more.
a hotel, get up the
text morning, spend a day on the job,
then drive to the next location in Colorado, then
through Texas, with the same routine.

Finally, he recalls, “I got tired of traveling and working so
hard all the time, and never seeing my family. I got burned
out.” In 1970-1971, he closed the Denver and Dallas offices.
This was not as simple as it might sound, however. “You don’t
just close an office like that,” he says. “You’ve made commit-
ments, and you have to follow them through. It took a couple
of years; I’ve never left anybody high and dry.”

But, never a man who could easily relax into a single job, Car-
roll started a small lumber yard close to home. Not surprising-
ly, this and a related wholesale roofing supply business grew into
several locations and a $40 million a year business. By this time,
however, his son and daughter were old enough to start taking

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[Image of a page from a book or document, showing a list of contractors and a heading: Join the Ranks of AWCI’s Lifetime Members]
over responsibilities, and Carroll’s hours began to approximate something like an eight-hour day. He noted, however, that his children were sharing the same workaholic habits, so, when he got a good offer to sell this business in 1996, he took it, there being enough prefabricated panel production, and is currently the architect for the Carroll companies.

Carroll retains a crew of five, but they work his own

money now so all the family could lead more relaxed lives. As for himself, Carroll says, “I went off the payroll five years ago, let it all go to the children.”

What Carroll says he has always “dabbled in” from the start, is real estate. His son, Bill Charles Carroll, is president of the New Mexico Division, and daughter, Carolyn, is president of what is called the 4-Corner Division. Her husband, Stan, was once the architect for a major manu-
The main business now is buying and selling real estate, and running several of its properties in New Mexico and Colorado. It also runs a wholesale sporting goods company called Team Athletic Supply.

Although Carroll says that on the day of the interview for this article he put in an eight-hour day he now just works when he wants. He doesn’t work at all if he doesn’t want to.

At age 70, he works just for fun of it, and will still go to an occasional AWCI convention “for the fun of it.” He’s played golf for 30 years, but now has the chance to do so on a regular basis. He loves to travel, to association meetings or just on trips to locations like Hawaii with his wife, children and four grandchildren.

Carroll has phased out of active participation in the wall and ceiling industry, but says, “Everything I’ve learned, I’ve learned from this industry. I’m tremendously pleased to see how AWCI has grown and to see how its purpose has become so focused. I’m honored and proud to have become a part of it.”

Looking back, Carroll says his most important memories “are the sharing and friendships I’ve had with other contractors. I’ve learned a tremendous amount from them, and, outside of my family, these have been the most important people in my life.”

It’s no doubt true that there are a countless number of wall and ceiling contractors who look upon Bill Carroll as one of the most important people in their lives too.