

## ALUMNI PROFILES: JOHN ANDERSON, LL.B/49 (from *Law Faculty Newsletter*, Summer 1986)

The luxury setting is spartan yet sensual, with none of the almost mandatory indiscretions of taste one commonly finds in business offices (polished floors, thick carpets, and substantial furniture awaiting the arrival of the stars of Dallas or Dynasty). The place is the 15th floor executive offices of Westcoast Transmission and John Anderson, President and Chief Executive Officer, comfortably dominates his surroundings. His windows command an exhilarating view of Vancouver's mountain-rimmed harbour; he can look down to the moorage of his 34 ft. boat which he has not time to use — "Well, maybe two or three times a year, for fishing."

His appearance is distinguished; he wears his impeccably tailored suits with an ease that professional models would envy, yet one senses he would be equally relaxed in rough, oil patch garb.

Questioned about his personal life, Anderson confesses to an unfashionably happy marriage of some 32 years. He met his wife, Janie, at Imperial Oil in 1951; she was employed there as a geophysical assistant. They have two sons, one a chartered accountant, a tax specialist. The other, who recently graduated from the UBC Faculty of Law, is presently studying in California. Anderson's two grandchildren —both boys —are one and three years old and an obvious delight to him. Living in California as they do, he regrets he cannot see them more frequently.

His one indulgence is golf, and he keeps it a non-business activity, preferring the relaxing company of friends. And he reads — avidly, even voraciously. Some 35% of his working time is spent in reading, absorbing, and relating information to business strategy, for his approach to management is not prescriptive, but instinctive. Can leisure enter into such reading? Certainly, but it is a leisure that is always informative, even educative.

John Anderson is deeply committed to his work and responds quickly to business questions. Enthusiasm animates him and one sees again the young, eager face of J. Anderson as it appears in the Class of '49 grad picture which now hangs near the Moot Courtroom, Curtis Law Building, UBC.

Anderson was in the first class to complete the new Law Faculty's three year programme. He directed his attention to education after three years as navigator in the RCAF and, with the intensity which has subsequently characterised his work, completed prerequisites in record time. Among his recollections of the Law School is the memory of a certain professor who, at a Law Ball, indulged in rather too much good cheer. The Dean —as Deans must do —delicately suggested that the professor ought, perhaps, to consider going home. With alcoholic indignation the professor declared before a delighted audience, "A fig to you, sir! A fig to you!"

A recessive economic climate in B.C. sent several members of that class to Alberta for employment. After articles, business proved of greater interest to Anderson than the usual law practice but that is not to say that he didn't achieve an impressive foundation in law for his business aspirations. A solicitor for Imperial Oil Ltd. in Calgary from 1950 to 1955, he became Canadian Division Solicitor for the Honolulu Oil Corporation, staying with them for five years. A member, at one point, of the Bars of B.C., Alberta, and Saskatchewan, he is presently a member of the B.C. and Alberta Bars.

He continued in the business world as Chief Legal Advisor for Pacific Petroleum Ltd. from February, 1961 and combined the office with that of Secretary in October of the same year. Until 1968 he maintained this position, then becoming Director of the company and, in 1969, Vice President and General Counsel.

Hereafter Anderson's career is a series of brilliant quantum moves within the Westcoast Transmission Company. From Director, Vice President and Treasurer in 1970, he became Vice President and General Counsel in 1971, while 1973 saw him as Vice President, Supply and Sales. From there, he moved to Senior Vice President in 1974, to Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Office in 1976 and, in 1982, the ultimate promotion, President and Chief Executive Officer.

Anderson is also Chairman of the Board and Director, Pacific Northern Gas Ltd.; Chairman of the Board and Director, Westcoast Petroleum Ltd., Vice President and Director, Saratoga Processing Co. Ltd.; and Director, Royal Bank of Canada. As well, he is a member of the Board of Governors, Business Council of British Columbia; the Board of Trustees, The Fraser Institute; and the Board of Governors, Vancouver Public Aquarium.

John Anderson makes it all look so easy, so entirely casual. Referring to his time as Treasurer of Westcoast, he recounts financial strategy, amounts of money counted in millions, not thousands, as casually as most men speak of buying, say, a new shirt. "I know my way around Wall Street," he says modestly.

What is the reality behind such achievement? The answer would daunt lesser men: hard work —a commitment not measured in eight-hour days; a regard for education as an ongoing challenge generated by new situations; a respect for thoroughness and common sense. Some may consider John Anderson hard-nosed, even intimidating in his relationships with employees or co-workers. Such a perspective is far from correct. Anderson may set high standards, but he never expects anything of others he wouldn't do himself. He is no backline general.

Under his direction Westcoast has grown substantially. In a time of reduced oil industry activity Alberta production, from 80/81 to 86 shows an enviable 266% increase. Anderson sees his job as that of not only preserving

present assets, but building solidly on them for the future. "There is," he says, "direction for growth. And although there must be, in reflection of the present economic conditions, a period of adjustment, the future is bright." He divides his direction of Westcoast into two entirely separate areas with seemingly contradictory managerial viewpoints. He advocates a conservative policy for the pipeline function, that of a lean and careful organisation. For exploration, however, he puts on the green eyeshade of a high risk gambler who, in this fascinating game, continually gains substantial rewards.

Politics do not interest him. He describes himself as apolitical, with a slightly conservative tendency. Quite straightforward about government intervention in the marketplace, he declares, "politics and business don't mix; the less interference the better. The marketplace is a great leveller. Good businessmen don't need handouts. If they can't compete,

they shouldn't compete; they shouldn't be there." Anderson has nothing but praise for today's young people. "They're bright," he says, "they're educated, and they're not afraid of hard work." Admittedly, he only sees the cream of the crop at his level, for Westcoast, offering excellent salary, benefits, and superb opportunities for advancement, attracts top talent. He warmly recommends a law degree as career framework for, he says, "law gives the benefit of logical and ordered thinking, an invaluable tool for strategy." His advice for success? Not unpredictably, hard work and common sense. "Forget the smartest, most innovative student," he emphasizes, "without hard work and common sense, he won't succeed. Those two qualities beat out all others every time."

How does John Anderson feel about retirement, mandatory at 65 at Westcoast? "I'll retire at the stroke of midnight, my 65th birthday," he says, but admits to no intention of "taking it easy." For him, retirement is a new horizon and, looking ahead, he mentions a possible return to study, with an interest in law. With no little anticipation, he considers the possibility of corporate salvage, of taking on selected insolvencies and remaking them into viable business entities. "And there's consulting," he allows. "The possibilities are endless." Retirement, then, is simply the end of one chapter and the beginning of another. The young RCAF navigator of the early '40s, now a corporate navigator, has no intention of putting away his charts.