

FOCUS ON THE POSITIVE: PERSONAL JOURNEY

Labels don't define local owner of billion dollar company

Connor Group, now \$1.3 billion company, was started from a small Dayton Apartment Community.

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Some children are “labeled” once they start school and these labels can sometimes stay with them for life. Greene County resident Larry Connor never bought into these notions and didn't allow a label to define him.

Connor moved to Dayton in 1960 when he was 10 years old and said his teachers decided early on that he would probably never go to college.



Larry Connor, a long-time Daytonian and business owner, in his new headquarters building in Miamisburg.

“I was in the eighth grade at St. Albert's school,” Connor said. “All the bright kids were in the A class and I was in the D class, which was essentially the dregs of the school.”

Teachers told Connor's parents not to expect much and that trade school was likely their son's only option.

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“They said college was out of the question for me,” he said.

But Connor, who always believed that hard work can make the difference between success and failure, ended up going to college after all, barely making it into Ohio University after graduating from Alter High School with a 2.0 grade point average.

“During high school, my friend, Mike McQuiston, and I decided to start a painting company,” Connor said. “We wanted a business but we had no experience and no idea how to price jobs.”

Undeterred, Connor and McQuiston worked for three weeks without a single customer until the pivotal day when they decided they would not quit until they had a job.

“Mike went to Oakwood and I went to Kettering and we found our first customer,” Connor said. “By our third year, we had three employees and more work than we could handle.”

At Ohio University, Connor majored in English and he had his “light bulb” moment, turning his life around.

“I went from being a terrible student to making all A’s” he said. “I was treasurer of the student government and president of my fraternity.”

Connor graduated summa cum laude in 1972 with no money and big dreams.

After graduation, Connor’s neighbor ended up giving him advice that would change his life.

“He (the neighbor) said ‘if you really want to learn about business, go sell something,’” Connor said. “I’ve always had an interest in cars so I started selling them for a Dayton dealership.”

Connor eventually went to work for EF McDonald, a job that would take him all over the world. “I lived in Morocco and Mexico City,” he said. “In a typical year I traveled to Europe 10-12 times. It was a tremendous time and a great learning experience.”

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Taking what he learned while working in the travel industry, Connor and a few partners eventually opened Newcom's Tavern in the Oregon District, a bar that attracted hundreds of customers on weekends during its heyday in the early 80's.

"I had no experience in restaurant or bar management," he said. "We made a lot of mistakes but after a lot of hard work and attention to detail, it was a huge success."

Connor sold Newcom's after two years, giving his investors a 119 percent return. "Those investors wanted me to do something else and that's how I got into real estate," Connor said.

Formed in 1991, "The Connor Group," is a result of all of Connor's business ventures and lessons learned along the way.

"We started the business with an idea and a vision to create an operating strategy with systems and processes that have never been used in real estate investment," Connor said. "And we were also deeply in debt."

Connor developed many of his strategies after spending a few years in the computer industry. "It's fiercely competitive," he said. "We learned techniques around people, productivity and measuring customer service as well as new ways of generating revenue. "

Since 1995, the company has been focused exclusively on apartments and today has about \$1.6 billion in assets with 14,000 apartment communities in 10 cities.

"I think I was fortunate that I never believed them (his teachers)," Connor said. "I knew that if I worked hard and was dedicated, then I would be successful."

Connor's active personal life includes flying in aerobatic competitions, and going on international white water rafting expeditions. He is also a two time national sports auto racing champion.

Today with 400 associates, the Connor Group has settled into its new headquarters building in Miamisburg.

“I narrowed down three possible cities for our headquarters,” Connor said. “I considered Hong Kong, San Francisco and Dayton. I settled on Dayton because it’s a great place to raise a family and it’s underrated in many ways. It’s an outstanding place to start and build a business.”

About the unique headquarters building, he said, “We wanted to create a great environment for our associates and make a statement about Dayton. There is a lot of innovation and technology going on here and we hope that, in some small way, the building is a symbol of this.”

Married for 34 years to wife Christine and a father of three, Connor admits he has been very fortunate in his life.

“We started program called Kids and Community Partners to give back to our communities,” he said. “It’s designed to help disadvantaged kids. We are working to make already good programs in our communities even greater.”
