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Gerald Gallegos: an empire built one house at a time

Not quite rags to riches -- but close

By Allen Best

The life of Gerald Gallegos was not quite rags to riches, but it was close. Gallegos, who founded one what has become one of the nation's largest masonry companies, died last week in Denver. Services will be held at Vail's Ford Amphitheater on Saturday, Aug. 28, at 1 p.m.

At its peak in 2008, the Gallegos Corporation employed more than 800 people plus another 200 people from temporary agencies. From its origins in the Vail area, the company had expanded first to Aspen and Telluride, then Denver – but also to other resort markets across the West: Sun Valley, Jackson Hole, Lake Tahoe and to the Yellowstone Club in Montana. With the recession, the company has shrunk once again, but even now has a workforce of 350 people.



Gallegos came from pioneer families in the San Luis Valley. One of his grandfathers was a miner in Bonanza, and the other grandfather had homesteaded land at Mogode, just west of Antonito, not far from the ranch on which the Salazar brothers – Ken, the U.S. secretary of interior, and U.S. Rep. John Salzar – had grown up. Gallegos spent his first years there before moving first to Red Cliff and then Minturn. His father worked as a miner at the Eagle Mine, a zinc-and-lead producer located along the Eagle River, as had a grandfather on his mother's side.

From an early age, Gallegos showed an entrepreneurial bent. His brother Bob recalls that he was very good at going door to door to sell their hand-knit linens and doilies created by their mother, Rosabell. After graduating from Battle Mountain High School, Gallegos went to Mesa State College. But he may have received his more influential training in on-the-job training helping build homes in the new resort of Vail.

Following an apprenticeship as a mason in Denver, he founded his own company in 1970. At first, it consisted of nothing more than a truck and a few employees, but one house at a time, the company expanded. The family likes to say that they built 70 percent of Beaver Creek, a place known for its extensive stonework, says Bob. Bob Gallegos had left work as a community organizer with a non-profit organization in Denver to head the office functions of Gallegos Corporation.

Seeing the need to diversify, Gallegos expanded geographically. For example, when Denver is doing well, Aspen might not, and Aspen might do well when Sun Valley was not. The company also expanded into specialties, including plaster and stucco, marble and granite counters, and stone sales

In time, the Gallegos Corp. built chimneys, patios and walls for many prominent people, including former Broncos coach Mike Shanahan and Re-Max founder Dave Liniger. Gallegos also diversified his personal time, sharing his wealth with such organizations as The Young Foundation, El Pomar Foundation, Roundup River Ranch. Along the way he also shared board-room duties with another Gerald – Ford, who lived part-time at Beaver Creek until his death several years ago.

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