



Jerry Overaa

Photos provided

All in the Family

Overaa Construction Celebrates Centennial

By Cathy Tyson

It all began back in 1907 when Carl Overaa started doing small remodeling projects for friends. He had only been in the country for five years, having left the family dairy farm on a fjord in Overaa, Norway. Since then Overaa Construction has grown and expanded into a \$180 million dollar volume company with a reputation of quality work, run by third and fourth generation family members.

The generation explanation is fairly straightforward. Founder Carl Overaa had two sons; Elmer who was tragically killed in a car accident and Clarence. Clarence had one son, Gerald, (Jerry). Jerry has four children, Carl, Kara, Julia and Erin. All but Julia work at the company in different capacities, as well as sons in law Colby Powell and Bryan Dissman. According to Jerry, there may be work for the 13 grandkids, when they're old enough, "but they'll have to earn it."

"We're aware, that it's pretty rare, having the same ownership," says Jerry. Carl adds, "...by being a very local, family-based business with a long track record, we are viewed as a safe bet, a stable firm, sincere and honest." They aren't kidding when they talk about being local, Jerry was in one of the first graduating classes at Miramonte, and all of the fourth generation "kids" went to Acalanes.

"I don't think I'm tough, but demanding," reflects Jerry on his style as a boss.

Daughter Kara, mother of four and part-time Marketing Manager partially agrees. "Yes, he's tough. He has high expectations, but is very fair." According to son Carl, there's no family rivalry at the firm because, "everyone has a different expertise, responsibility." Although father usually knows best, there have been differences of opinion especially with regard to new technology. "Trust me, guys, there's a better way of doing this," says Carl about generational differences.

Jerry adds, "This generation are very hard workers, it makes it easy for them to blend in and be accepted." When reflecting on traits the entire family shares, "Clarence was almost modest to a fault, conservative, very self-effacing. Even the 13 grandchildren – they are all pretty slender, pretty blond, and reasonably quiet with a modest humility."

"I'm very fortunate to work with my family, and have the opportunity to work with my best friends," says Kara. The downside can be the family dynamic, "you go in with a lot of history. My parents always encouraged us to work there (Overaa), but never forced us. Do what you love, was their advice."

Recently Overaa Construction had the winning bid for the new Lafayette Library. "This is probably the largest project Lafayette will undertake. Very complicated building, technologically complicated, tough site and it has almost museum quality construction. One of the toughest buildings we've ever built," notes Jerry.

Overaa is also currently working on the

Mercantile Building and relatively recently completed the Orinda Library. Over 30 years ago they completed the Lafayette BART station, and because of the quality of their work, they went on to do 15 additional BART projects.

"In the next hundred years we'd like to continue to build upon our reputation within the industry. Build upon our integrity as a family run business. We want to be the commercial contractor of choice, and the employer of choice. We have a very long term horizon." Not surprisingly, Jerry has no plans for retirement.

Overaa Construction has come a long way from the 1926 contract to build Richmond High School, where carpenter's received a 10% raise to \$1. per hour. In 2002, a new office building was constructed to accommodate its 200 employees. The full service firm specializes in the following: parking structures, water and waste-water treatment facilities, religious facilities, seismic retrofitting, educational, recreational and healthcare facilities, and finally science and technology projects.

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