

Joe Carter Denman
Interview 79b
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ABSTRACT: Joe Denman and Carolyn Elmore discuss the origins Diboll Day and the Diboll Booster Club. Mr. Denman also talks about the beginnings of the plywood operations, land and timber management, and the failed Champion merger.

Interview with Joe C. Denman

By Carolyn Elmore

Talking about formation of Booster Club and Diboll Day.

Joe Carter Denman (hereafter JD): I don't know exactly who all – we were having breakfast one morning at the Pine Bough. Basically most of the clubs at that particular time, in Diboll, were meeting in the evening, the Lion's Club. So we decided at that meeting that we would get a bunch of guys together and form a group just for the purpose of boosting Diboll. We had our first meeting, and we had a very large turnout, in a place called "The Tonk," it was adjacent to the theater. At that meeting we started talking about having a homecoming, people coming back to Diboll. Then we started thinking about ways to raise money and so the purpose of the meeting, we all decided, was that any money we raised would go for programs for the kids. As we got into it we started feeling pretty good about what we had going on and the interest and all. Then we really were pushing the idea, not pushing but promoting the idea that any funds that were raised would be for the youth of Diboll which would help in a lot of things that were needed at that time, a park and swimming pool, so this was an effort on our part, further getting away from a company town. Everybody got interested in it and we circulated that anybody who boosted Diboll was a member. That's basically the way the first one went. It was such a success in interest, you know, to raise \$1300.00, that was a whole lot of money at that time, we thought. After that we went on and each year it got bigger and better. Everybody worked at it, had a lot of fun. It was on a much smaller scale than this last one naturally, but it was in the same spirit. Everybody was working for the same purpose.

Carolyn Elmore (hereafter CE): Is that all of that?

JD: Yes.

CE: Your trip – was there anything significant about that trip?

JD: It was just a trip that we went on to explore an opportunity of new equipment to see some operations in that particular part of the world, to see if we could apply any of them in our operations which we did. Love Wood Products came up with some equipment which they saw over there, that they would be able to enter into some of the things they

wanted to do and, by the same token, some that we wanted. That was in the early stages for the particle board and we were particularly interested in that particular area. That was the reason for the trip.

CE: What about the Southern Pine Plywood technology? Weren't you one of the inventors of most of that equipment?

JD: That was organized, we started, I believe it was in the meeting of Forest Products Research Society in Hot Springs, Arkansas, and at that particular meeting there is a picture of all the people who were there. Tom Orth and I were particularly interested in – but let me back up from that point. Even before that, some time in the early 50's Arthur had me go to Center, Texas. We had actually taken some logs over, Southern Pine logs, over to Center, Texas, and there was a little hardwood-plywood plant there. They sliced the veneer instead of peeling it. We made plywood out of Southern Pine even before that at that location. We determined it was feasible to make Southern Pine Plywood and actually some of it was used right in Diboll that was produced. But there was not equipment available to really get into the industry at that time. By the equipment, I mean the equipment to handle the small logs. So at the Hot Springs meeting, and I believe the representative, if I remember, was someone from Kirby, Tom Orth and I were good friends, Tom, myself and this fellow named Hess, I believe, was there, but again, I would have to refer to the book to see who the people were who was there. We formed a standards committee, Southern Pine Plywood standards committee because to be able to market the product in this country you had to have standards. So that standards committee, in turn, worked with the Forest Products Lab in Madison, Wisconsin. Also, we sent logs out to British Columbia. I mean, we, Southern Pine Lumber Company, and in conjunction with U.S. Plywood, we made a run of Southern Pine Plywood production and then, after that, running the lab tests and all, we determined it was feasible to do it, that's when we announced the Diboll plant. That was the first Southern Pine Plywood plant that was built from the ground up. There is another plant in Georgia that started up, what they did, they used equipment that and they actually made plywood. Basically in the South we were the first ones to use Southern Pine lumber.

CE: You were actually hands down in designing that plant, weren't you?

JD: Yes, I was involved with U.S. Plywood. It was a joint venture – 50-50 deal. They were to do the management but they didn't do very well.

One day I was out running the operation lumber at the Diboll/Pineland treating plant and Arthur called me. He asked what we did about the treating plant. He told me "I want you to go over and start running the plywood plant today, this minute. I want you to get that straightened out."

CE: How long did that joint venture last?

JD: I would say it probably lasted about four – three or four years. It was a friendly departure, but it was the proper thing to do.

CE: I would like to have your thoughts on – we talked about this briefly yesterday, stewardship of the land. Your thoughts on that, your philosophy on that.

JD: Well, you know the Temples, when they came in and bought the first land, they never did clear cut the land and a lot of the other companies did clear cutting and then they went off and left the land. They did not put anything back into it. We did not have the technique like we do today, for clearing cutting and planting, so the Temples...we use selective cutting and the lands you see today were plans that were made under the Temples was selective cuttings. Natural reproduction came up in the land and they always took care of the lands. In other words, they did not abuse it, what they did what they thought was best forestry technique from the very beginning and that's the reason why we are such survivors. In my opinion, because there was a stewardship and a feeling for the land to be looked after. When I was referring to U.S. Plywood, they did planting and clear cutting out on the West Coast. They did some planting which was a half-ass job, to be perfectly honest. It would be lands that Champions had right next to Weyerhaeuser, but Weyerhaeuser did the same, but they did an excellent job. But you could follow these lands. A friend of ours took us in his helicopter, Kenneth and I actually flew in a helicopter out there for about five days, looking at their lands. So it wasn't just small tract observation. That's what I was referring to.

CE: We think, in the future, that is still something we have to maintain.

JD: Oh yes, there's no question about it, in my opinion. The management techniques we have today are a different thing. We will have selective cutting areas here but, by the same token, to grow the maximum off the land we can certainly use the technique of clear cutting like we are now. I can show you areas in Boggy Slough that were not clear cut. There were areas in fields in the early days we permitted grazing of cattle and the cattle kept the trees grazed down. When we discontinued grazing and went in and planted, it is just like a new forest.

CE: Are you the author of the "Good Neighbor" slogan? "We want to be a good neighbor?"

JD: No, I don't think so. You could ask Allen on that. I have used that remark some, we want to be a good neighbor and I have used that a lot but I didn't, that's one thing I can't answer. I always felt we wanted to be a good neighbor and Arthur did, too, and all of us probably used that phrase. All of the lands touch somebody. You can't have as many lands as the company does without touching somebody, so you have to be a good neighbor.

CE: Okay, were you one of the organizers of the SFPA?

JD: No, I was not, that was before my time. I was one of the past Presidents. It was the old Southern Pine Association and I was President.

CE: They branched off or something.

JD: We changed our name from Southern Pine Association to the Southern Forest Products Association which was better represented of what we were doing.

CE: And just one last question. Your thoughts on the Plywood Champion merger that was called off, we talked a little bit about that yesterday.

JD: That was after that trip to California. We shouldn't mention names. It would have been a bad deal for the company.