

Les Olander

Born July 4, 1927 in the extremely small town of Awhanee, CA, Les Olander grew up on a cattle ranch nestled in the Sierra Nevada foothills. It certainly was a challenging life, with digging post holes, mending fences, cutting firewood, milking cows and weeding the garden. Typically that was just the first twelve hours in a normal day on the ranch.

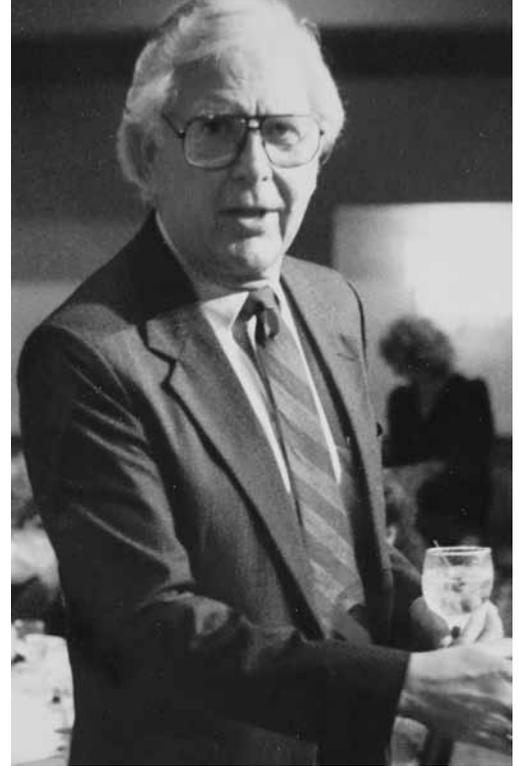
Due to the demand for all able bodied men in the early days of World War II, Les found an opportunity at age 14 with the California Division of Forestry. Working as a summer firefighter he was able to add to his savings plus he got a respite from the routine of the ranch. Les graduated from high school at age 16. After fire season Les enrolled at Fresno State College. His time there was interrupted by a tour of duty in the Navy. He didn't see much action while in the military as he spent his time shipping between the ports of San Diego, San Francisco and Seattle.

After his discharge from the Navy, Les returned to Fresno State. He also took on a part time job at jcpenny. Les had plans to be a stock broker once he graduated, but Store Manager Jim Temple had other plans for him. Temple gave Les a copy of "Main Street Merchant" to nurture his interest in retailing. And that, coupled with a \$10 a month raise, got Les to commit to jcpenny. By 1951 Les had already managed several parts of the store including Shoes and Men's Clothing/ Accessories. Additionally, in 1951, Les was blessed with the birth of his only daughter, Jennifer.

Les was assigned to the Redwood City store in 1953 where he worked with SM Walt Coy. While in Redwood City his second child, Bradley, was born. Les then accepted a position in the Monterey, CA store working with SM Payne Dearing. That was followed by a promotion in 1959 to Southern California as the Assistant Manager at Arcadia. Les worked first with Ralph Gunn and later with Don Clark. Al Hughes was the Chairman of the Board; Mel Batton was the President of the company; and son Scott was born. Les merchandised the entire store achieving sales gains for 31 consecutive months. As a result, Les was promoted to the Assistant Manager's job in nearby Whittier Downs reporting to SM Ernie Steele.

In 1963 the Company started a major move to greater central organization and Central Buying. Group Management presented Les with an opportunity to work alongside other future leaders such as Al Johnson, Bill Lewis, John McDermott, Wally McKay, Clayton Walker, Bill Mitchell and Larry Griffith. Les was handed Hard Lines as his assignment, a group of businesses which experienced exponential growth in the years ahead. Everything from building the assortments to creating the advertising was handled by these managers.

In 1966 Les accepted the job of Sales and Promotion Manager for Southern California. Advertising, promotions and presentation were entrusted to him. One of his favorite recollections of this job was the day Ross Sonne, then the Area Manager, called him into his office to relay a recent phone conversation between Sonne and Mrs. Penney. The couple had been vacationing in nearby Palm Springs for



Les Along With Don Gergovich and Ron Hudnall

nearly a month. It didn't take long for Sonne to learn that Mr. Penney was disappointed with the lack of newspaper interest about the growth of the company that bore the J.C. Penney name. Les soon put together a plan for the L.A. Times and ABC News to interview Mr. Penney at LAX. Mr. Penney had a plane to catch and Les arranged for Mr. Penney's car to arrive early enough for the reporters to get their story. This job gave Les the ability to not only shape business for the many stores he served, but he could also make the time to showcase the company's number one asset (Mr. J.C. Penney).



Al & Mo Rogers with Helga and Les

In 1967 Les was promoted to Hard Lines Merchandise Manager for the L.A. Market. His youngest child, John, was also born. There were quite a few Full Line Stores planned for the ensuing years. Les had the challenge of getting them ready. In 1970, he received his first store management appointment to Berkeley, CA. In addition to competing for customers, Les also had to stave off several riots spawned by the Cal students. Berkeley had been a hotbed of student activism for years, first led by one Mario Savio. Les and his oldest son, Bradley, soon became experts at boarding the big glass windows of his store. He would share later with his friends that he wasn't intimidated by hippies because he knew in his heart that he had raised at least one.

In 1975 Les moved back to Southern California where he took the helm of City of Industry, a new store opening in Puente Hills. In the first 12 months Les and his seasoned management team blew by the opening plan of \$9 million plus the fifth year sales estimate of \$12 million. They achieved a record \$14 million in sales and "life was good". Managers on his staff like Ron Hudnall, Joanne Bowman, Rod Viera, Ted Moxley, John Minton, Don Gergovich and Mark Schultz brought their collective experiences to City of Industry and everything clicked. His final assignment came in 1984 at Huntington Beach, CA where he infused a new energy. With managers like Ross Willour, Darrell Bradley and Sandy Gonzales reporting to him, Huntington Beach realized sales and profit numbers near the top of the L.A. Market. Les retired in 1989, sharing that while the store manager got a lot of the credit for the results in Huntington Beach, he wanted all to know that it was the talent and efforts of his management team that made that store a standout.

In retirement Les has kept busy! He has helped his son, John, with a startup company called RockRebel where he shepherded cash flow and receivables. Les also parceled out guidance drawn from his forty years of retail experience. He also found the time to co-own and be the president of a mortgage brokerage company and remains active today as a broker/agent in South Orange County.

Les and his longtime girlfriend Helga Osterman, a former jcpenny management associate, have traveled extensively over the years visiting family and friends. They also try to get out on a golf course as often as possible, usually in the company of family, friends or at an H.C.S.C. outing. Together they enjoy a comfortable and peaceful life in the coastal community of Dana Point.

Les singles out his proudest accomplishment as his four children: Jennifer, Bradley, Scott and John. He loves them very much, along with his grandchildren and his friends. Les will be 86 years old this year on July 4th and he is not sure where he is going next. But he has one last request... "Please don't send me back to the ranch!"



Les & Helga Surrounded by Friends at Spring Fling 2013