

Local builder honoured for lifetime work

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Times Colonist

Gordon Denford, a child evacuee from England during the Second World War who used his wits and work ethic to become one of Victoria's most prolific developers and respected entrepreneurs, has been named this year's recipient of the Lifetime Achievement Award by the Greater Victoria Chamber of Commerce.

"I'm very honoured and a bit surprised by all the attention," the 83-year-old Denford said in an interview yesterday.

He will be the guest of honour when the chamber doles out its annual business awards April 28 at the Fairmont Empress Crystal Ballroom.

Denford was 13 when he left his parents in bombed-out Bristol in 1940, and lived in Winnipeg foster homes before moving west and starting an electric heating company in Victoria, and later Capital City Construction, the largest curb and gutter company in Canada. He parlayed his business acumen into a construction career that spanned five decades and included some of Greater Victoria's most innovative planning and building concepts.

He was also a co-founder of Canadian Western Bank in Victoria and still helps to run Denford Construction Management with his son Chris, one of the only companies in Canada that completes building projects "from the dirt up." Headquartered on Fort Street, the company employs 500 people ranging from heavy equipment operators to interior designers.

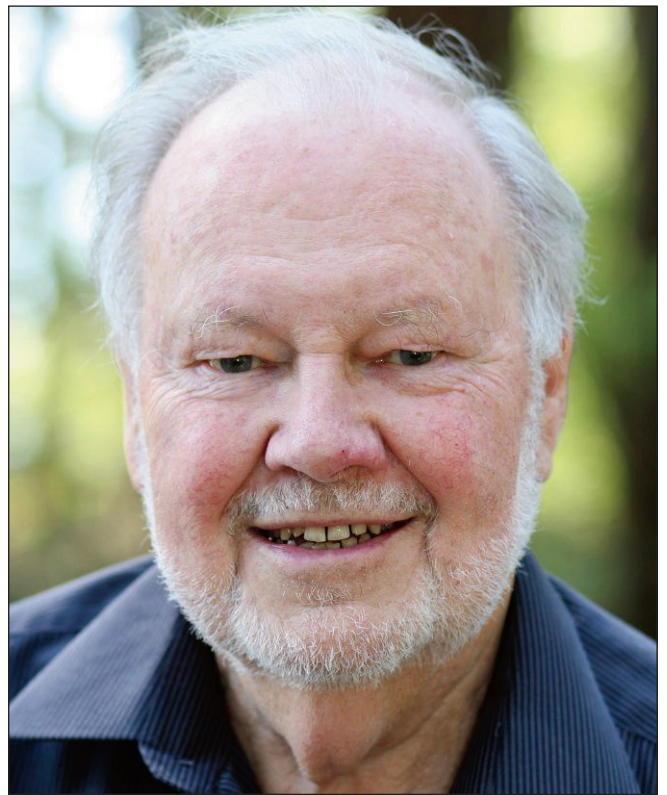
For the past decade, Denford has focused the

company on building the Berwick brand of superior retirement residences; the latest in the group of five is in Royal Oak. He's also a partner in the new Cherry Bank condo development in the Humboldt Valley.

In all, Denford has been involved in more than 50 projects in a dozen communities in Canada — although he says he has never actually added them all up. Some of the first were apartment buildings in James Bay. He also built the first condominium buildings in Victoria at Doncaster Drive and North Dairy Road, completed the first bare-land strata development in B.C. with Summergate Village in Sidney and built the \$18-million Royal Quays condo on the Songhees.

During the early 1980s, when interest rates rocketed up to 20 per cent and brought the construction industry to a standstill, Denford and a local partnership group of Willy Eng, Al Vandekerkhove, John Chew and Curtis Purdon formed their own bank with backing from Intrawest and some Asian and B.C. investors. Western Pacific Bank got its charter from the federal government and builders were able to borrow at reasonable rates. It went on to merge with the Bank of Alberta in 1987 and form Canadian Western Bank. Denford remains a big shareholder today.

"We formed it as a western regional bank that looked after western interests," said Denford. "Every decision was being made from an ivory tower in Toronto with no connection at all to us in the West. We were saying at the time the big banks had about as much vision as they could



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Gordon Denford, a multi-faceted builder-developer, will receive a lifetime achievement award from the Greater Victoria Chamber of Commerce on April 28.

2010 CHAMBER AWARD NOMINEES

Business Leadership

- Ambrosia Catering & Event Centre
- Page One Publishing Inc.

New Business

- Maximum Furniture and Wholesale
- Sterling Financial

Innovation

- Aquamist Carpet Care Ltd.
- City Green Solutions Society

Outstanding Customer Service

- Rental Owners & Managers Society of BC
- Victoria Marriott Inner Harbour

Business of the Year (1-10 employees)

- Admiralty Leasing Inc.
- Cedarwood Productions Inc.

Business of the Year

- Black Ball Ferry Line
- Ruffel & Brown Interiors

Business of the Year (26-75 employees)

- City Green Solutions Society
- National Car & Truck Rental

Business of the Year (76+ employees)

- Commissionaires Victoria, the Islands & Yukon
- Scott Plastics Ltd.

Employer of the Year

- Chemistry Consulting Group Inc.
- Tourism Victoria

Business Person of the Year

- Tim Cormode, Power To Be Adventure Therapy
- Al Kemp, Rental Owners & Managers Society of B.C.

Young Entrepreneur of the Year

- Jeremy Wilson, Adrena Line Adventure Tours
- Amanda Schofield, Clean Conscience Inc.

Employee of the Year

- Lisa Brideson, Inn at Laurel Point
- Carinna Kenigberg, Power To Be Adventure Therapy

see from the top of the Royal York."

Denford maintained he always built residences that he would be proud to call home. "I try to be innovative all the time," said Denford. "When I was building those condos at North Dairy, I built them to be affordable for families with reasonable mortgages, but without sacrificing the quality and appearance."

That perspective gained

Denford an early reputation for integrity in the community. He added to his reputation by staying involved at the community level.

Denford served on the planning and advisory committees of both Saanich and Victoria, served as president of Tourism Victoria and just finished an eight-year term at the Victoria Airport Authority. He's been a Central Saanich resident for more than 40 years.