

Dennis R. Washington

Biography

Dennis R. Washington was born in Spokane, Washington in 1934 but moved with his family back to his mother's hometown of Missoula, Montana, when he was very young. When World War II broke out his parents migrated to Bremerton, Washington seeking and finding work at a defense shipyard. Living in a government housing project, Dennis contracted polio when he was eight but managed a good recovery.

Following the war, Dennis's parents divorced. He bounced around California, Washington, and Montana, living with relatives and going from one school to another. By the age of 14, he was self-sufficient, earning money by boxing groceries, delivering newspapers, shining shoes, and working as a mechanic in a service station. During his final years in high school he lived with his grandmother in Missoula.

After high school Dennis went to Alaska to pursue a job in heavy construction. Two years later he returned to Montana and worked for his uncle who owned a construction company. By age 26 he was vice president of the largest construction company in Montana. In 1964, with a loan from a Caterpillar dealer, Dennis went into business for himself. His first contract was a challenging one; it involved carving a parking lot at the rocky summit of Glacier National Park. Later, forest road building work prepared him for interstate highway construction jobs. By 1969, he was the largest contractor in Montana; within ten years Washington Construction would be listed among the largest in the nation.

In the early 1970s, Dennis branched into contract mining. A daring 1985 purchase of a dormant copper mine in Butte, Montana brought that mine back into profitable production and provided resources for other expansion. He diversified repeatedly, entering into dam building, railroads, and marine transportation services.

In 1996, Washington Construction Group merged with Morrison Knudsen to form Washington Group International, one of the largest public design/build construction companies in the U.S. WGI grew and thrived and was eventually sold in 2007.

Today, Dennis Washington's private businesses, The Washington Companies, include environmental remediation, heavy equipment sales, the largest privately owned railroad in the U.S., and one of the largest marine transportation companies in Canada. Other major business interests lie in container ships and aviation services.

An ardent philanthropist, Dennis and his wife Phyllis established the Dennis & Phyllis Washington Foundation in 1988. Focused on education, health and human services, community service, and arts and culture, the Washington family and the Foundation have contributed to the success of organizations in Montana and throughout the nation.