

## *Leo Rubstello built a retail company that covered two states*

**By: LaRAYNE WATTS**

Leo Rubstello was born at the Riverview Hospital to Adam and Olyse Rubstello on Jan. 21, 1925. He was raised in Raymond. His father owned and operated the Rainier Club on Ellis Street, which closed down in 1933.

Leo graduated from Raymond High School in 1942 in a class of 33 girls and 17 boys. Leo's brother and two sisters are also RHS alums: Chester Rubstello graduated in 1936 and was the class salutatorian; he is 83 years old and lives in Seattle. Sister Bonnie (Rubstello) Hayford graduated in 1939; she is 79 years old and lives in Olympia. Sister Sally (Rubstello) Girard, 77 years old, still lives in Raymond; she graduated in 1945.

Leo says, "The Ninth Street Elementary school building was a precious building in our formative years. What I recall were the hard working and dedicated teachers we had in grades one through eight."

He especially remembers his 4<sup>th</sup> grade teacher, Marjory (Tuttle) Hansen. He said, "She was my first infatuation; very patient and understanding, and pretty, too!"

He also recalls Ray O'Dell, who coached junior high basketball and high school track. "He had a keen insight into teaching fundamentals of sports and was able to instill confidence and competitiveness," Leo said.

Another important teacher in his school career was Louis Bruno, who, Leo said, "lifted the spirit and goals of the students of Raymond High School as high school principal. He was highly respected by everyone."

After graduating in 1942, Leo attended the University of Washington for one year. He was drafted into the U.S. Army in 1943 and spent two and a half years with the Army Airways Communication System (AACS) At Elmendorf Field in Anchorage, Alaska.

After his discharge, he attended the University of Oregon from 1946 to 1948. In 1948 he used the G.I. Bill of Rights to learn the retail business under Ray Meredith at Meredith's 10-cent store in Raymond.

In January of 1950 Leo moved to Okanogan to manage a Meredith's 10-cent store there. He met and married Fay Hamilton, an elementary school teacher at the Okanogan Grade School. In 1959 their variety store burned down.

In 1960 Leo and Faye moved to the Seattle area.

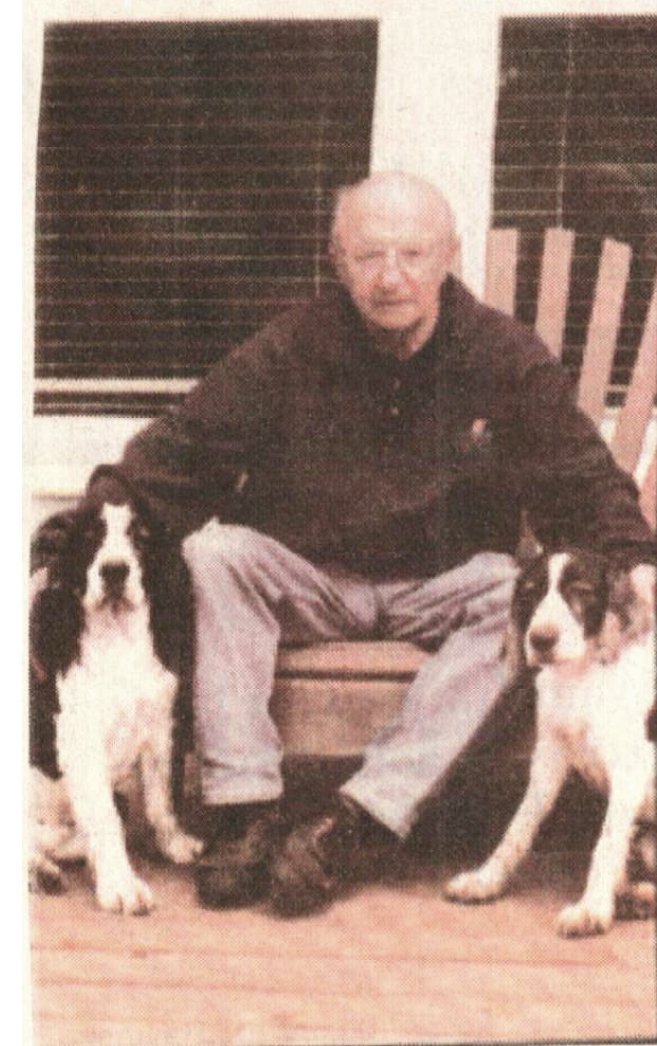
Leo joined Oregon Athletic Equipment Co. in Portland, Oregon, in the fall of 1962. He worked in retail sporting goods with and for Oregon Athletic until 1974 when he transferred back to Seattle as the organization developed into the Oregon-Washington Athletic Company.

In October of 1976 Leo and his family opened Exercise Equipment Center (EEC) in Seattle. Over the years the business expended. Eventually they operated seventeen retail specialty fitness equipment stores: one in Anchorage, Alaska, six in the Seattle-Tacoma area, eight in San Francisco, California, and two in Sacramento, California.

In 1992 Leo stepped down from the presidency of the company with its day to day responsibilities to become chairman (an advisory capacity). His second son, James Alan Rubstello took over as president. In May of 2000 they sold the business to Brunswick Corporation out of Chicago.

Leo and Faye moved from the Bellevue area to Port Orchard in 1991 to relax and enjoy the retirement. They have been married for 48 years and have two sons, one daughter, eight grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren.

When asked his advice to this year's seniors, Leo replied "Sports was and is tied into my background. I was fortunate as a sixth grader to learn to set goals in life and then in later years cast upon those basics in entering business on our own. I believe that being in business is just as extension of one's competitive nature. All the basics, all the fundamentals, one needs to carry on are available in the Raymond School systems – the challenge is yours."



RHS Alumnus Leo Rubstello, 1942