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NEWS

A World War II veteran worked into his 80s building JCCS Accounting into western Montana-wide firm



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Key Points

The History Museum's Legacy Night fundraiser is 6 p.m. at the museum (422 2nd St S.). Tickets are \$30 for members and \$35 for non-members.

The History Museum didn't have to look far to find its winner of the 2019 Legacy Award, business category.

That's just as well. Not too many awards go to accounting firms.

LEGACY AWARDS: [The History Museum names its 'Person of the Year'](#)

LEGACY AWARDS: [Meadow Lark Country Club marks 100 years of golfing, socializing and more](#)

LEGACY AWARDS: [8 6 years of digging in the dirt for Great Falls' 'unsung heroes'](#)

[JCCS Accounting](#), next to the [History Museum](#), does have a past worth noting. Ward Junkermier founded the company with George Campanella in Great Falls in 1946.

"I like the work very much. I have a lot of old-time clients," Junkermier told the Tribune in 2004. He was 84 then and his face still lit up when he talked about coming into work.

"I'd probably work even if I didn't get any money," he said. "I've got a friend who is retired. All he does is get up, eat breakfast, walk around the block and watch TV. What a boring life that must be."

Junkermier died later that year at age 85.

He was a Great Falls native, born in 1919. He went to college at the University of Washington and got his MBA from Harvard in 1942, according to his obituary. He spent 35 months in the European theater, serving in England, Belgium, France and Germany, mostly with the 118th Infantry. After the war, he returned to Paris and was a trial judge advocate.

Junkermier dreamt of being a lawyer and was good at arguing both sides, but his family needed to eat so he had to get to work, Jerry L. Lehman, a JCCS shareholder, said.

Besides the accounting firm, Junkermier developed land at [Lindbergh Lake](#) in the Seeley-Swan Valley and founded the Lindbergh Lake Logging Co.

People who were his clients stuck with him, Lehman said. "He had a great personality, a robust, strong personality.

"Ward didn't think old, even in his 80s," he said. "He was a really forward-thinking individual."

He was a mentor. He was fair. He loved a good martini.

Lehman joined the company in 1981. JCCS made the best offer as he prepared to graduate from the University of Montana, so he took it. He became a shareholder in 1992 and was CEO for 11 years, stepping down in 2014. Now he's tasked with scouting other firms to acquire.

[John Stevens](#) is now the company CEO. He's based in Whitefish.

In 1964, the company merged with another firm to become Junkermier Clark Campanella and Stevens, which has remained its name even as its acquired other firms.

The company's growth is part of the reason Lehman stayed with the firm.

"When I started, it was two locations, but soon came the third. They were getting bigger, and that appealed to me," he said. "They were progressive and a great bunch."

JCCS is the third largest accounting firm in Montana, with about 120 employees and locations in Great Falls, Helena, Missoula, Whitefish, Kalispell and Hamilton.

In Great Falls, the company has about 10,000-12,000 clients, Lehman said. About 70 percent are individuals and 30 percent businesses, from small rural grocery stores to major statewide corporations.

In the 1990s, the company saw its first woman shareholder. They're now 7/17 shareholders. The company has had as many as 30 total shareholders but is at 17 as a generation retires.

"The lady shareholders are some of our strongest," Lehman said. "They do a good job holding the clients' hands, they're empathetic and they pay attention to detail."

People think of accountants as numbers nerds, but it's the ones who are good with people who make the best CPAs.

They need to be able to listen to clients problems and come up with creative solutions, Lehman said. It's not just plugging in numbers but consulting on best practices.

Museum director Kristi Scott said the judges appreciated the firm's wonderful benefits for its employees, its role as a great neighbor to the museum and its

history.

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