

Ryan Harstad on Curtis Harlan Green

Curtis Harlan Green was my maternal grandfather. He was born in 1925 and lived the majority of his life in Minneapolis, Minnesota, before his death there in 2002. With family in the tailor and furniture businesses, Curt developed a strong passion for design from an early age. He went on to earn an undergraduate degree at the University of Minnesota and a graduate degree in design at MIT, where he studied under Finnish modernist designer Alvar Aalto. Curt's education provided the tools necessary to launch a distinguished career as an architect back in his native Minnesota. He led design projects for churches and schools in Minnesota and nearby states early on, expanding his focus as he gained experience and recognition.

Curt was a devout Christian and an active member of his Lutheran church. He "wore his badge as a reserved Swede", taking pride in his Swedish heritage and Swedish values and traditions. Beyond spending time with his family, Curt's personal interests included golf, cars, and traveling.

MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS – Curt's primary accomplishment was founding Hammel, Green and Abrahamson, a Minneapolis-based architecture firm, in 1953. He and Dick Hammel started the company out of Curt and Marje's basement, bringing Bruce Abrahamson into the partnership a few years later. HGA now earns approximately \$100 million in annual revenue and employs nearly 600 people across several offices in the US. Along the way, Curt and HGA won numerous local, state, and national awards for architectural design as well as recognition by the Governor of Minnesota and the King of Sweden. Across a vast body of work spanning decades, some of Curt's favorite projects included Minneapolis' Orchestra Hall, the arts center at Gustavus Adolphus College (St. Peter, MN), O'Shaughnessy Auditorium at the College of St. Catherine (St. Paul, MN), the Benedicta Arts Center at the College of St. Benedict (St. Joseph, MN), and St. Bede's Priory (Eau Claire, WI).

I consider Curt's life as a family man a major accomplishment as well. He taught my cousins and me the importance of family values and time with loved ones through his example. He was married to Marje, his high school sweetheart and my grandma, for 55 years before he died. With Marje, he built a large and close-knit family of Greens with four daughters, eleven grandchildren, and two (now seven) great-grandchildren. It is because of Curt's family leadership and example that I stay in regular contact with my extended Green family and continue to enjoy trips to Minnesota for summer time or Swedish traditions at Christmas with the family.

INTEGRATION FOR MUTUAL GAIN – Curt managed to create overlap between the domains of his life in a number of ways. First, his entrepreneurial venture allowed him to control his time. Though he certainly worked hard for his own firm, he benefited from the freedom and flexibility to dictate his schedule. Second, Curt found many ways to use his passion for design to help and connect with others outside the professional domain of his life. He served as an important member of the broader Twin Cities community through his ability to employ an increasing number of people and contribute designs to buildings in the metro area (Orchestra Hall being a good example). He similarly utilized his skills in designing a place of worship for his congregation, giving the Lutheran Church of the Reformation a new home and supplying the design for its ultimate expansion as well as artwork for its interior. He helped with design projects for his residential community later in life, and even designed the homes for his family and his daughter's family. Third, Curt wove his family and community together through membership in his church and the Minneapolis Golf Club. Many of Curt's friends shared his faith or his passion for golf, and my mom and her sisters built many friendships through church or summers at the club course and pool.

LESSONS FROM CURT – In composing this leadership biography, I reflected on three lessons from Curt's example. First, Curt's accomplishments outside the scope of his work for HGA show how much opportunity exists for one to leverage his or her professional interests or skills in other domains. It hadn't struck me how important Curt's gift for design had been in his connections to stakeholders in his family and community domains. His example has inspired me to think creatively about new ways in which I can leverage my own experience and interests for wider benefit. Second, Curt's unique ability to influence and connect with others –

whether it be through motivating by example, sparking a new passion in someone, or finding a shared interest with a new friend – serves as solid proof to me of how contagious and magnetic true passion can be. Curt displayed his passions for design, family, golf, and others so outwardly and with such genuine zeal that those around him couldn't help but take an interest in him or the sources of such passions themselves (like I did when he introduced me to golf). I believe I can improve by being more conscious of how my passions can be a positive force in how I connect with people – even when they don't share those passions themselves. Third, Curt's willingness to take a risk in founding his own business and the hard work he put into making it a successful enterprise point out how courage and diligence can provide opportunities for a better life. In reflecting on how Curt positioned himself to create such overlap in the domains of his life by making good on a risky bet, I've begun to reconsider how I'll approach major decisions in my own life.