

## A Learning Experience

*By Hap Hansen*

On January first, I will begin my 24th year of retirement. I must say that I have not missed a single moment of corporate responsibility. Now, to the story from years past:

Finally, an opportunity to run a division and a subsidiary of a highly rated New York Stock Exchange-based corporation. One hundred eight-five employees, over \$250 million in pipeline, distribution, gas production and drilling assets. Many millions in revenues. Enormous growth opportunities. And now, it was my responsibility.

Several trips were made to this new area of operations in a Western Colorado community. Employee meetings. Budgets to prepare. Five year forecasts to be developed. Profitability to be assured. Public affairs to be fine-tuned. Fellow associates to be won over. Senior Officers and Directors to be kept apprised of developments. This was the most responsibility I had ever undertaken. In my previous position, only five employees reported to me. Prior to that, the Chairman of the Board, for reasons unknown to me, had downgraded my position, demoted me to a lesser grade, spanked me verbally and nearly fired me. Now, he was gone. Fired by the Board for any number of reasons. The new Chairman believed I had the moxie, determination and ability to run this sizable Corporate Subsidiary and Division profitably. To him, I will be eternally grateful and I was determined to prove him correct.

The community to which I had been assigned had a unique feature. An enormous cross on a nearby mountaintop was kept lit at night. The cross was spectacular and could be seen from every part of town, which was appreciated by the town's residents. While I consider myself to be religious, I am not a regular churchgoer, although I viewed the cross frequently at night and was impressed and moved by its presence.

First morning on the new job. Up at six, at the office by seven. The first employee, other than the 24-hour dispatcher, to be at work. I had driven to work in a heavy January fog. As I opened the office curtains, the heavy gray atmosphere seemed foreboding. Sitting for the first time at my desk, it hit me! An almost overwhelming sense that maybe I couldn't handle this position and the deep gray overcast only heightened my concern. With heart racing, I wondered if I should call the Chairman and ask for my old job back. As I gazed out the window, trying to conquer my fear, a small part of the fog lifted, revealing the beautifully lit cross on the mountaintop. That moment became one of the biggest learning experiences of my business career. My fear subsided. Through misty eyes, I gave thanks, and knew that professionally, I was at last, home.