



Don Crabb started Don's Towing in 1969.

Photos: courtesy of Yvonne Crabb



Don Crabb began driving recovery vehicles in 1959.

“He’d never ask a driver to do a job he wouldn’t do himself.”

by Blake Desaulniers

The Silver Fox

Five decades of service made Don Crabb a legend.

If you have been around the tow business for any length of time, you have probably heard the name Don Crabb.

Crabb, now 81, has long stood as an icon of the industry. Across five decades, he has owned, operated, grown, bought, and sold businesses, mentored young people, and made countless friends among colleagues and customers.

Crabb got his start driving trucks and running a service station out of Calgary in 1959. Eventually, the cold winters got too long and harsh for him, so he packed up and headed west.

Crabb arrived in Kelowna on November 22, 1963—the day Lee Harvey Oswald bent the course of history by firing shots that killed U.S. President John F. Kennedy.

From those early days through to his eventual retirement from towing in 2000, Crabb earned a reputation for running an immaculate operation and for setting the highest standard in customer service.

“As far back as when he ran his service station in Calgary, people would say that the shop floors were clean enough to eat off,” says his daughter, Yvonne Crabb. “He ran his towing businesses the same way. It was all about pride—pride in his trucks, pride in his people, and, most of all, pride in the quality of service he provided. He always said that we had nothing but service to set us apart and that if we didn’t take good care of our customers, somebody else would.”

Those high standards were first officially recognized in 1967, when the British Columbia

Automobile Association (BCAA) awarded Crabb his first service contract.

Don's Towing

Two years later, in 1969, Crabb decided he wanted to get into towing full time and operate his own business. He approached a local owner in Kamloops, looking to buy his business, but the man turned down Crabb's offer. So Crabb started his own business, Don's Towing. From a single-truck operation with no shop, Crabb built Don's Towing to ten trucks within six years, due in part to a second BCAA contract awarded in 1969.

During the same period, Crabb served his community as an RCMP auxiliary member. At one point, he operated Don's Towing in Vernon and owned Hilltop in Revelstoke, in addition to owning and operating Don's Towing in Kamloops.

Crabb eventually sold the business to present owner Joe Wielgoz. Wielgoz has kept Don's name on the business to this day because it enjoyed such a good reputation. "We certainly didn't suffer from keeping the name on the business," he says.

Wielgoz got his start in the business working for Crabb for 15 years, from 1972 to 1987, when Crabb sold out. He recalls a man with a firm handshake and a generous smile—a man widely known as "The Silver Fox" for his distinct mane of grey hair.

"Don was a great people person—great at the front counter, and very personable," says Wielgoz. "And he worked hard. He'd be the first guy in every morning, and he'd be up at 2:00 a.m. to come and help if he got the call. He'd never ask a driver to do a job he wouldn't do himself. He had very high standards, and he expected everybody to meet them. Some might have thought he was tough to work for because of that, but he always treated people fairly."

Bayview Towing

Crabb definitely had retirement in mind when he sold Don's Towing in Kamloops in 1987 and moved to White Rock, B.C. But he hadn't been there long when BCAA called and asked him to help serve the quiet Vancouver suburb—just a little part-time work to keep him occupied on the side.

It didn't exactly work out as planned, though.

Bayview Towing may have started as a sideline to Crabb's retirement, but it soon became a thriving towing business. Vancouver and its southern suburb White Rock grew each year, and so did the demand for towing services. The same values of hard work and great service that had propelled Don's Towing in Kamloops to success worked to propel more business through the door at Bayview. By 2000, the little, part-time, one-truck operation had grown to seven trucks.

Crabb would eventually sell Bayview and

truly retire from the business, but before he did, he trained the man who still owns it.

Cory Rushinko came knocking on Don Crabb's door in 1992, a green kid with a real desire to work in towing. After applying at the office several times with no success, Cory decided he needed to meet Don in person, so he turned up at his home one Saturday afternoon, decked out in a shirt and tie, with a resumé in hand. Don hired him.

"He was a hard guy to work for, but at the same time very easy to work for. He was very picky about his trucks being spic and span.

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Everyone knew Crabb by his head of silver hair.



Don's Towing grew from a one to ten truck operation in six years.

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His drivers had to look tidy, or he'd send them home to change. No showing up in torn or dirty jeans," says Rushinko. "The thing I remember most about Don is his silver hair. Everybody knew him by that hair. That and his smile. He genuinely cared about people—his customers, his staff, everybody."

"He was a hard guy to work for, but at the same time very easy to work for."

Crabb's daughter Yvonne may have the best perspective of all. "He has a fundamental respect for people he meets. He remembers names and faces most people would forget," she says. "He trained people who would eventually come to compete with him. I think he's proud of that. And he always worked with an attitude of friendly competition when those people went out on their own. I think he's proud of that, too."

"He has a great sense of humour, and I think that helped in business. He enjoys simple things and always has a smile on his

face," Yvonne adds. "He always demanded the most out of people, too. He demanded that they took care, the same kind of care he would take himself."

On one occasion, on a late night call, Crabb slipped and fell from the cab of a truck while trying to hook up a customer. He knew immediately that he had broken his ankle. Rather than leave the customer hanging, he called out another unit and made sure that the customer had been looked after. Only then did he climb back into his own truck, drive home to the yard, and get himself to hospital to have his broken ankle attended to.

Family

Most of all, Crabb's was a career driven by a passion for service—a passion that waned only after the loss of his wife. "After she was gone, I never saw him drive a truck again," says Cory Rushinko.

Crabb's family was always a big part of the business. Yvonne worked in administration, and Sheldon Crabb, Don's son, gave up engineering studies to work with his father at Bayview

Towing in the 1990s.

"He taught me how to be a good businessman. But more than that, he taught me how to be a good person," Sheldon says.

How would Don manage in today's market?

"The technology around the business has changed, that's true. Computerization and digital dispatch have made things more efficient, safer, and better. Don was never big into technology," Sheldon says. "But those things are just tools. They change over time. Don succeeded in business not because of tools and technology. He succeeded because of his values... He was all about being a pro. In towing, it helps to have a great work ethic, pride in achievement, and a sense of humour, but, most important, you really have to want to help people. If not, then you're in the wrong business. That's Don."

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