

Who was I.J. Holton?

Austin Daily Herald

Hormel Foods Corp. first hired I.J. Holton in 1947. Only months before, the name "Hormel" was a foreign term to him.

"I happened to be a chili eater and loved it but never paid any attention to the manufacturer," he said to a Herald reporter in 1995. A fellow law school student had recommended he look into a job with the company. Holton followed through and was invited to an interview in Austin.

It was the beginning of his 36 years with Hormel, a stretch of time that would render him a legend in Austin and a leader to the company, as president from 1969 to 1979 and CEO from 1972 to 1981. Holton, 92, died Wednesday, April 12, 2012, at his Austin home after a stay at St. Marys Hospital in Rochester.

Ira James Holton was born Aug. 16, 1919 to Ed Mabel Holton in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. After graduating from high school, he attended the University of Iowa. He graduated in 1941 with a bachelor of arts degree and a Phi Beta Kappa key, according to a company biography at Hormel.

Holton then entered the Army, according to the company biography, where he served as an infantry private and participated in the Normandy invasion. He was later promoted to major.

After his military service, Holton went to law school at the University of Iowa. The university's Alumni Association said in a profile Holton had trouble getting financial aid during law school. This would later motivate him to donate scholarships and arrange for financial aid for students.

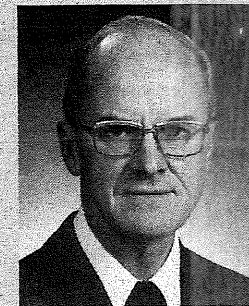
How'd the school board pick Holton?

The Austin Public Schools Board voted in August of 2012 to name the school after I.J. Holton.

Holton was one of five names chosen by a naming committee from dozens of submissions in a community vote to name the new school that summer.

The board voted the name through on a roll call after the first round of voting, when board members Jeff Kritzer, Greg Larson and Aaron Keenan voted for Holton.

"That was my first choice because [Holton] was a supporter of education," Kritzer said at the time, citing Holton's love and support for education as well as his humility. "He was just a great example of someone who was a great leader as well as very humble."



"I enjoy doing it and get a good feeling from it," he later said. "I remember so clearly how I needed scholarships when I was going to school."

Fresh out of law school at Iowa, Holton had originally intended to be a teacher there. He took the job at Hormel instead, deciding to get a few years' experience first.

"They piled up so much work on me when I got [to Hormel], I could never catch up so I could leave," he said to the Herald.

Holton had a strong worth ethic, based on the notion that no single person could define the success of any company.

"I wanted to accomplish each task with all of the talent and energy I could bring to it and create an atmosphere where everyone could work in dignity," he said of his goals at Hormel. Over the years, he worked in many positions with the company, including staff attorney, corporate secretary and president.

Despite how many roles he played at the company, Holton remained modest about his work.

"I have a good feeling about

the illusion that I'm being helpful," he said. Holton saw many changes and innovations in the company, including the beginning of construction of a new Hormel plant in 1979.

"He had a very dry wit and a well-developed sense of irony," said his daughter, Janet Holton. "He was a man who would sit back and assess the situation carefully before making a move."

Holton officially retired from Hormel in 1983 with fond memories of the company and his coworkers.

"I'll admit that it's an unusually fine company," he said. "It's been a joy for me to work in a company like that and with people like that."

Hormel's current CEO and President Jeff Ettinger said he was a great leader and even better person.

"He had the ability to connect with so many people," Ettinger said in a statement Thursday. "His leadership helped Hormel Foods grow both domestically and internationally and laid the groundwork for the company we are today. He will be truly missed."

He stayed involved with the

company through The Hormel Foundation, which he was involved with for 25 years.

"My wife over the years always said that [Hormel] was our biggest child because it was getting most of my attention," he said in 1995.

In addition to Holton's oldest daughter Janet, he had another daughter, Ann Paparella, and a son, Brooks Holton.

Janet said on nice days she would ride her bike home from school and Holton would return from work.

"We would all have lunch together and chat about how the day was going," she said. On nights with good weather, Holton would round up the neighborhood kids and take them to A&W for a root beer and some popcorn, she said.

Holton's wife, Adelaide, preceded him in death. For a while she was very sick, and Holton would take care of her at their home, Janet said. When Adelaide could no longer stay at home, Holton paid her frequent visits in the hospital.

"He would go out to visit her twice a day," she said. "You could set your watch by it."

Holton was a voracious reader, Janet said. Starting in 1960, he began keeping a list of all the books he read each year. This continued almost until the day he died.

Even after his retirement, Holton and a group of other Hormel veterans would still gather once a week in Austin, he told the Herald. He valued the sense of identity he had in the city and how many people would greet him by his nickname, "Jim," when he walked down the street.

Holton lived in Austin from 1947 through the end of his life.

A letter from I.J.

In 1957, Austin seventh-grader Colleen Engelmann wrote I.J. Holton to ask him a burning question.

"My assignment in English is to write to someone whom I admire. I would like your opinion on the character traits you think a seventh-grader should concentrate on developing. I will read your reply to the class."

Holton wrote in response:

"Dear Colleen:

You ask what character traits I think a seventh-grader should concentrate on developing.

There are two traits which I think we should strive to develop at any age. Honesty comes first because it is basic to our western culture. With it we gain the respect of our contemporaries and all of the advantages that come as a result of that respect. Without it we lose whatever chance we have for inner quietude.

Industry is the second of these traits. In a world where we are required to maintain ourselves through our exertions, it is most advantageous to be so accustomed to applying ourselves to tasks that we actually obtain enjoyment from such activity. I'm sure you have heard it said many times that genius consists of one part inspiration and ninety-nine parts of perspiration.

It occurs to me that there are at least two additional traits which a seventh-grader, particularly, might do well to foster. One is curiosity. The habit of searching for reasons and answers without being compelled to do so is not only rewarding in personal satisfaction but also in material ways as we grow older. A person who makes inquiries on his own initiative is a responsible person, and responsible people are always in demand.

A final trait, less important than the others perhaps, is courtesy. Courtesy consists of conducting ourselves with ample consideration for the rights and feelings of others. We have many personal contacts with people of all imaginable backgrounds. Courtesy enables us to make these contacts with a minimum of conflict or friction. The courteous young person is liked by his associates and finds favor in the eyes of his elders. The discourteous young person not only does himself a disservice, but harms all young people.

Thank you for thinking to write me, Colleen. It has pleased me very much."

From: "Craig Johnson" <cjohnson@hoverstenlaw.com>

To: "Michael C Ruzek" <mcruzek@charter.net>

Cc:

Date: Tuesday June 20 2017 10:20:40AM

I.J.Holton-Austin Community Scholarship Committee

Mike,

As your group is considering recognition of Jim Holton, you asked me to recall a few matters about his involvement with Austin Community Scholarship Committee.

I looked through my old file and tried to recall some matters about that.

He and James L. (Jim) Olson were the Founders of this organization. Sometimes Phil Richardson is also referred to as a Founder, but I think the idea originated with the two Jims. They were both in the management of Geo. A Hormel & Co. (as the company was then named). Phil Richardson was one of I.J.'s closest friends and, being an attorney, I assume Jim (Holton) called on Phil to legally organize this charity, which was probably done gratis. Phil also served on the Board from the beginning.

Jim Holton told several times of how he grew up poor, was in difficult financial circumstances as he entered college, had no money or support from others and had to work his way through college and, after WWII, law school, though perhaps he had GI Bill support by that time. He always remembered how difficult it had been to get an education when one was poor and he wanted to help others toward an education without as much financial deprivation. It was reported that Jim Olson had experienced the same issues.

In 1960, they formed the Austin Community Scholarship Committee. Their hope, as you know, was that as scholarship recipients entered the work force, they would, in turn, contribute to the fund to help the next students in line. As you now, that approach was a dismal failure. I.J. seemed rather bemused by that element of human behavior and thought that aspect of the charity was worth the education we got. Yet, he never gave up on the mission and efforts of the organization. He contributed money every year to support the scholarships. He never sought to build an endowment within the organization, but rather wanted to grant as many scholarships each year as there were funds available. In years that there were a couple applicants more than the funds available, and particularly if the applicants were short of money and trying to improve their lives by resuming their education later in life, at the selection meetings he would announce that he was contributing more to the fund to allow a grant of the extra scholarships. In his will, he left another \$ 100,000 to the charity without restriction. A few other bequests have also been received, but the Board has decided to not hoard these funds (or in more positive parlance, create an endowment) but rather to slowly use these funds over the next several years to see that as many qualified applicants as possible can receive scholarships.

Jim did much more than give money to the charity. For decades he prepared the agendas, wrote and delivered the press releases, collected the applications, prepared a matrix of information about all the applicants (hand-written by him), wrote the award letters, nominated board members and officers (rotating the leadership among board members) and kept the meetings brief – never even close to an hour. He was the heart and soul of this organization for more than 40 years. In keeping with his personality and his methods, he insisted the organization keep a low profile, being simply and frugally organized and operated and NEVER allowed or accepted any credit for his own ideas or efforts.

This charity, and the students who have been served, have benefitted by the generosity of The Hormel Foundation over the entire history, which happened due I.J.'s efforts. We are now also receiving more public support and some former scholarship recipients and their parents are contributing too. So, the two Jims' hopes are coming to some fruition.

Since 1960 (and through 2016) Austin Community Scholarship Committee has contributed \$ 904,096 in scholarships to 693 students and total administrative costs over that entire time have been \$ 13,846.89, most of that in the past few years when we have paid for part-time help to do the tasks Jim formerly did on his own.

This charitable organization is emblematic of who Jim Holton was-accomplishing no end of good with minimal cost and no fuss or self-interest.

Craig

Craig W. Johnson

Attorney at Law

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The Pillars of Austin Committee

Subject: I. J. Holton information regarding the Austin Area Foundation

I. J. Holton(Jim) became interested in the Austin Area Foundation early on in its development. Between 2001 and 2003 there were public meetings to get input from the community regarding the possibility of establishing a community foundation. We brought in different speakers and shared with the public information that we had obtained. It was after one of these meetings when Jim came to me and stated that he thought this could be a good thing for the community and if our committee decided to go ahead to let him know. The challenge of putting all this together for a community foundation was at times overwhelming, but to have Jim endorse the concept and offer support was very welcome. In 2003 we became officially the Austin Area Foundation and to cover some of the legal work Jim's first donation was \$5000.

Another way Jim helped our foundation was to set up a donor advised fund within the Austin Area Foundation. From time to time he would send me instructions for disbursements out of his fund to worthwhile causes in our community. He was very direct that these disbursements should be noted as from the Austin Area Foundation because he wanted our foundation to have the visibility and credit. He did this for several years and although we followed his instructions we did indicate to the recipient that a thank you note to Jim would be very appropriate.



When Jim's wife, Adelaide, died one the memorial designations was the Austin Area Foundation. Jim later on told me that Adelaide might be wondering what this organization is that's called the Austin Area Foundation. This is one example of Jim helping in creative ways to get the word out that Austin now had a community foundation other than The Hormel Foundation. The family had no instructions as far as the use of the memorial's therefore it was our decision to how best to use the money. We did make donations to the medical providers that had served Adelaide.

Jim Holton donated to the Austin area foundation over \$200,000 and that did not include the donor advised fund as stated above. The \$200,000 was given with no restrictions; to use at our discretion but we always let Jim know how the money was used. Much of this money was used to build up the Austin Legacy Endowment Fund which has become a nice financial resource for nonprofits in the Austin community. We also used the money to create a reserve fund and to give out a little more in disbursements when the investment performance was down.

When Jim Holton was recognized by the Austin Chamber of Commerce for the life achievement award, I remember vividly when he gave his acceptance speech he made it a point to mention the Austin Area Foundation and me as chair.

Gentlemen Jim Holton as he was affectionately referred to was an outstanding person. Smart but always humble, affluent but very charitable, helpful but not taking over, high positions of influence but always respectful of everyone, a good sense of humor and often he was the subject of the joke.



Sincerely, Mike Ruzek

I met I.J. Holton when the Rotary Club had lunch at Neveln Elementary, where I was teaching. We had a nice visit, and in our discussion he mentioned being at Normandy during W.W.II - which our 5th graders were about to study. When asked, he immediately agreed to tell our students about his experiences.

We gathered all 3 5th grade classes into the auditorium on the day of his visit. When I walked in, he had the stage full of things pertaining to the war. He came up to me and asked me to pin a flower on his collar that a neighbor had given him. He told me that his neighbor knew what a special day it was for him to be at Neveln, and gave him the flower in honor of the occasion. I was struck by the fact that he felt so honored to be with us, a man who has done so many amazing things. He acted

humbled to be with us, when in reality we were the ones so honored.

Mr. Holton did an amazing job of telling his story of the war. He talked about being on the ship, offshore of Normandy, the night before the invasion. He was in the kitchen cooking a sausage when there was an explosion. He felt his leg and it was all gooey. He told the kids that he had heard when you are seriously injured you don't feel pain immediately. He thought he had been badly injured and the pain would come soon. What had really happened was, the sausage exploded and was splattered on his leg. I remember him laughing and laughing as he told that story.

After Normandy, Mr. Holton told us how he was in a convey that helped liberate Paris. After that he went on to help liberate people in a concentration camp. He brought lots of articles to show us, including a photograph of himself published in a book during this time. We all sat spell bound listening to his stories.

The next day I had the kids write
thank you notes to Mr. Holton. Shortly
after that, I received a large bundle
of letters back from him. He wrote
individual letters back to every student
answering questions they may have
asked in their letters. One child wrote
saying he really liked the parachute
Mr. Holton picked up on the beach at
Normandy. In his return letter to the
child, Mr. Holton cut off a corner of the
parachute and put it in the envelope
for the child.

I will always remember Mr. Holton,
wearing his flower because it was a
special day for him. But the reality is,
the honor was all ours. He shared his time,
his stories, himself ... and we were
all enriched.

Shana Wangsness

I. J. "Jim" Holton was a quiet philanthropist, a humble man who was so frugal with himself that he would have his own shoes re-soled, yet generous to a fault with others and with his Austin community.

Jim's introduction to the Austin Public Library began in 19__ when he was appointed to the library board by Mayor "John O'Rourke." Prior to Jim becoming a board member, the library board had originally started planning for a new library in the early 1980s, but a library referendum failed by the mid 1980s when Ellis School burned down shortly before the referendum was held. Thoughts of building a new library began to resurface in the early 1990s during Jim's tenure on the library board, spurred on by an earlier bequest by brother and sister Karl and Alice Lindstaedt that had grown to over \$450,000. Rather than face the uncertainty of the success of another referendum, City Administrator Pat McGarvey spearheaded the City of Austin's approval of \$1.8 million in TIF (Tax Increment Financing) if the library could raise an additional \$1.8 million, with the goal of opening a new library in the summer of 1996.

To achieve that goal, the library board devised a "pyramid" plan in 1994 where library board members would make a 1-5 year pledge to the library fund drive, and then each board member would meet individually with 3-4 potential donors requesting pledges. These 3-4 donors would then each meet with 3-4 donors, and so on. Since Jim Holton was the recently retired CEO of Hormel Foods Corporation, it was natural fit for him to seek donations from fellow workers in the Hormel Corporate Office, along with local businesses. Jim led by example by making a substantial personal pledge. He then further sweetened the pot by requesting that the Hormel Foods Corporation match every donation dollar for dollar from current or former Hormel employees, whether employed in the Corporate Office or in the Hormel plant. Jim was quietly relentless in his pursuit of donors, eventually raising nearly \$1,000,000 through his own personal pledge and other pledges. If Jim felt a business could donate more, he would gently persuade them to contribute a much larger amount by leveraging one businesses' pledge against another. The library fund drive exceeded its goal by garnering pledges totaling over \$2.4 million, raising over \$600,000 more than the \$1.8 million dollar original goal. The library fund drive was so successful under Jim's leadership that over 99 percent of the 1-5 year pledges were fulfilled, an unheard percentage for fund drive pledge fulfillment.

The new 24,000 square foot library opened in 1996. But a new building needs to be supported, so in addition to earmarking the extra \$600,000 to be spent over the next ten years for new books and items for the library, the opportunity came up to become involved with the Minnesota Foundation. The Minnesota Foundation was offering start up grants of \$5,000 if local organizations could raise an additional \$5,000. Needless to say, the Austin Public Library became part of the Minnesota Foundation with an initial donation of \$5,000 by Jim Holton. But Jim's support of the library didn't stop there. Whenever a member of the community passed away with whom Jim had been acquainted, he would make a generous memorial donation to the library with the caveat that a letter from the library would be sent to the family of the deceased, but the amount of the donation would never be disclosed.

The library board wanted to honor Jim Holton for his time, talents, and donations in support of the library by having a large photo of him framed and hung in the library's small meeting room where the library board held their monthly meetings. Jim felt giving should be a private matter, so he very reluctantly gave permission for the picture to be hung for one year only, with orders to then remove it and put in storage never to be hung again. His wishes were honored.