



WILLIAM A. RICE/DAILY MINING GAZETTE

Herman "Winks" Gundlach stands between the Chemical Sciences and Engineering Building and the Mechanical Engineering-Engineering Mechanics Building on the campus of Michigan Tech University July 25. Gundlach's company, Herman Gundlach Inc., served as the contractor for these and many other buildings on campus and around the Upper Peninsula.

Cornerstone of the community

Man built education,
business, charity in U.P.

By Ryan Olson
Gazette Writer

HOUGHTON — As the Copper Country landscape changed over the past 90 years, one man helped provide the building blocks. Herman "Winks" Gundlach Jr. and his

company, Herman Gundlach Inc., helped build the foundation for Upper Peninsula business and education. In recent years, he's helped create programs to encourage reading and to help provide the needy with automobiles.

Gundlach recently celebrated his 90th birthday. The event was marked with an event held in his honor at the Miscowaubik Club in Calumet.

Gundlach said he's lived a full life. "For the mental capacities given to me, I think I've done the best I could with it,"

he chuckled.

The Houghton Rotary Club honored him by naming him Rotarian of the Year. Recent past president Ron Helman said the club honored Gundlach for his lifetime of achievement and reaching 90 years.

"He's a community builder in many, many ways," he said. "Besides the construction that he did as a contractor, he was building volunteerism, community

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support and fund-raising."

Gundlach has remained active in the community since his retirement from construction in 1987. For 57 years, he's served on the board of Good Will Farm, a Houghton-based youth and family service agency.

Executive Director Mark Lambert said it's a joy working with Gundlach.

"In my prime, I'm not as clever and sharp as he is at 90 years old," Lambert said.

In the past three years, Gundlach has helped introduce several new programs in the area including the "Read to Ride" program awarding bikes as prizes to area youth for summer reading, and "Wheels" where students fix up donated cars for people without transportation.

When Little Brothers Friends of the Elderly launched a fund-raising campaign Helman said Gundlach's involvement made it a success.

"When his name's behind it you know it's top notch — his name kind of echoes success," he said.

Gundlach was born on Houghton's Douglass Avenue on July 16, 1913.

He excelled in football as a defensive and offensive guard, first as team captain at Houghton High School, where he graduated in 1930. Later, he was captain of the Harvard University football team and played lacrosse while earning his degree in civil engineering.

He was elected to the college club in 1935, a team that included future President Gerald Ford, and played against the Chicago Bears. He signed and

level, Gundlach said the most competitive field was on the sandlot in west Houghton before entering high school.

"That was our freshman and JV teams, and they were tough kids," he said.

After his football career, Gundlach continued the work of his father whose regional contributions include building Douglass House, several Michigan Tech University buildings and mining company homes. He initially set up his business in Atlanta before he was called to serve in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers as America prepared for World War II in early 1941.

After the Allied victory in Europe, Gundlach left the army as a major and returned to the Copper Country. He intended to move back East after settling his father's affairs, but something held him back.

"I had the whole family with me, I saw my mother and sisters, and then the old feeling came back — the Copper Country feeling of wanting to stay," Gundlach said.

Gundlach said he chose friends and family over possible business success out East.

"It was a great decision as far as renewing friendships and my love of the people of the Upper Peninsula and the Copper Country. I simply don't think there's anybody like them anywhere," he said. "From a family and business point of view, it probably was a bad one."

While many parts of the country experienced an economic and building boom after World War II, Gundlach said construction in the Copper Country lagged behind.

"There would be one (build-

In 1987, his business was transferred to Michigan Tech University through a combination of gifts, sales and liquidation. Champion Inc., of Iron Mountain, purchased the company two years later and renamed it Gundlach Champion Inc.

Family plays a large role in Gundlach's life. He said he still enjoys visiting his daughter and their families.

Gundlach met his wife Barbara while he was at Harvard and she was attending Radcliffe College.

"Barbara was a tremendous bright lady," he said. "I was very much in love."

They married when they lived in Atlanta, and had four daughters. Barbara Gundlach died of cancer in 1983. The Barbara Kettle-Gundlach Home was named in her honor.

Gundlach said he given his famous nickname by his father when he was young. When he was first in school he was extremely proud for being able to recite "Wee Willie Winkie" running through the town.

"I did so many times around the house, I guess according to my mother that my dad said 'He's Winky,'" Gundlach said.

Regardless of name or title, Lambert said Gundlach truly believes in helping others.

"His heart has always been for the less fortunate and he's proven it time and time again," he said.

Gundlach said its important to keep up with the times.

"You have to be sure that you're growing with it and changing with it," he said.

THE WINKS FILE

The Houghton Rotary Club named Herman "Winks" Gundlach its Rotarian of the Year. Ron Helman, Rotary's recent past president, prepared some highlights Gundlach's life:

Name: Herman "Winks" Gundlach

Born: July 16, 1913

Education: Graduated Houghton High School, 1930; graduated Harvard University in 1935 with a bachelor's degree in civil engineering.

Highlights: President of Houghton High and Harvard football team. Played for Boston Redskins. Named to hall of fame at Michigan Tech University, Upper Peninsula, Harvard Varsity Club. President of Herman Gundlach, Inc. until retirement in 1987; a member of more than 22 professional associations.

Awards: Named Copper Country person of the year in 1977; received honorary alumni award by MTU; honorary doctorate from Suomi College; received 20 other awards.

get that job, you waited for months."

Gundlach still succeeded in finding work for his company. His business received contracts to build throughout the Upper Peninsula. Buildings include the Ontonagon paper mill, buildings for mines such as White Pine, Empire and Tilden, as well as houses and schools.

Gundlach built the Copper Country's tallest buildings, including the Republic Bank building in Hancock and R.L. Smith Mechanical Engineering Building at Michigan Tech. The company, at its peak, employed as many as 500.

Paul Frair, a long-time employee of Gundlach's, said he enjoyed every minute. He retired as superintendent in 1988 after working for Gundlach for a total of 35 years.

"He's the most honest man I could imagine working for," Frair said. "He was honest to his employees. He was honest

Frair remembers Gundlach's words on the way to a new project.

"He said, 'I want you to be superintendent on this job, do a good job, give the owner everything the plans and specs call for,'" he said. "It impressed me an awful lot because what more could you ask for."

As an employer, Gundlach strove to keep employees working year-round, helping pioneer techniques to continue working in the cold of winter.

Over his career, Gundlach served in 22 professional associations according to a biography prepared by Helman. Gundlach has been recognized with more than 20 national and local awards for his contributions and efforts including inductions into three sports halls of fame — the Upper Peninsula, Michigan Tech and Harvard Varsity Club.