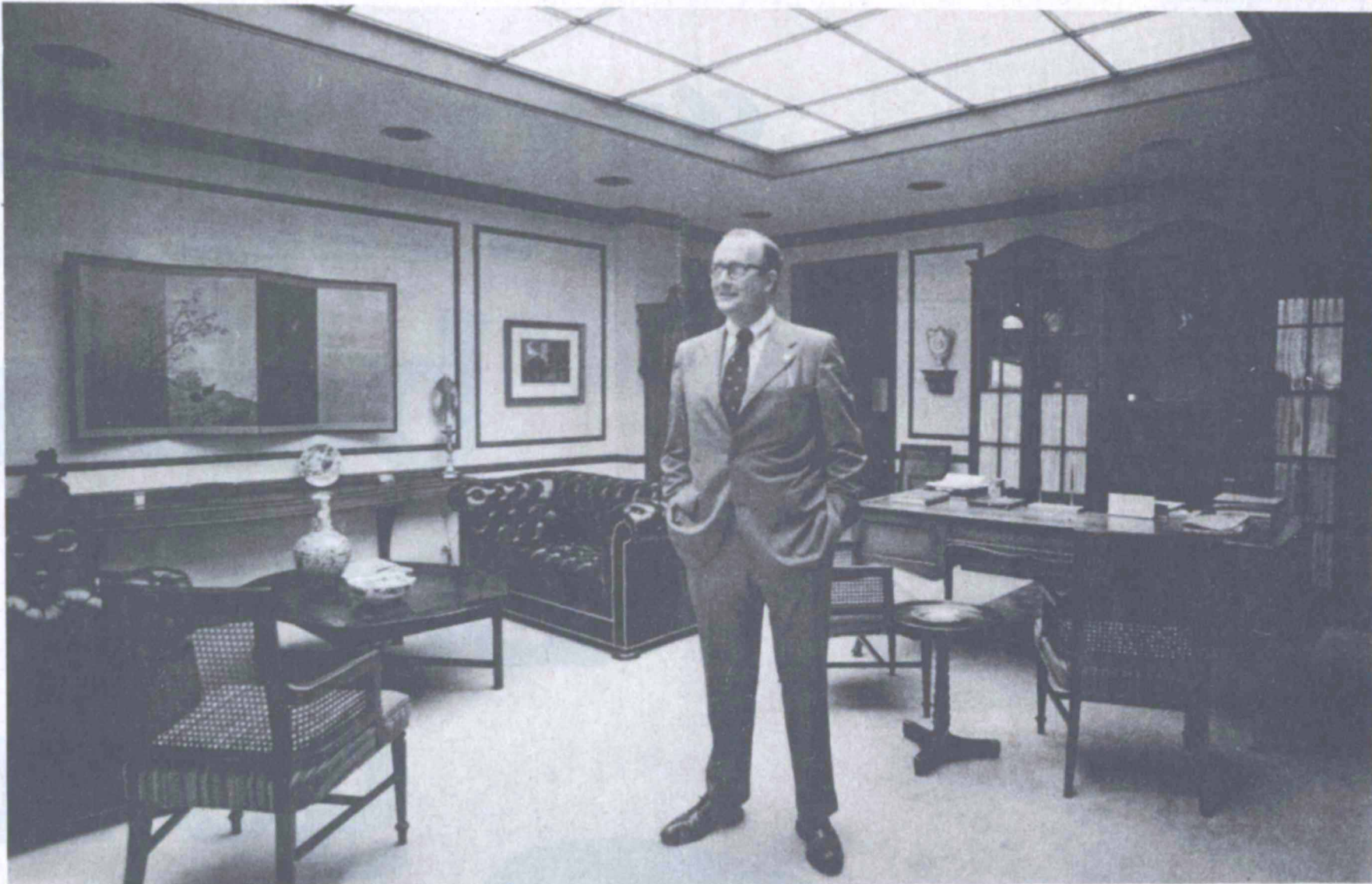


Man at the top



JOHN D. ONG IN HIS SPACIOUS SIXTH-FLOOR OFFICE
"I was younger than everybody else in high school and college"

Uh'ville's John Ong: grocery boy to Goodrich president

By JIMEATON
Business Editor

It's a long way from the small-town grocery store to the executive suite, but John D. Ong has made the trip, keeping the interests that earned him a reputation as a quiet, studious youth in his native Uhrichsville.

The president of B. G. Goodrich Co. in Akron for 14 months, Ong once delivered groceries for the former Carnahan's Store in Uhrichsville. He also mowed lawns and spent a lot of time reading history. The American Civil War, was his favorite topic.

The reading has changed from Lee vs. Grant to business publications, to which Ong devotes Sunday after services at Christ Episcopal Church in Hudson. The musical interest cultivated as a trumpet player in the high school band, which was directed by the late Dominic Greco of Dover, has shifted from playing to listening.

Ong enjoys listening to music while reading in the library of his 140-year-old house. A former member of Greco's Dover Concert Band and the all-Ohio high school band, Ong now is a trustee of Blossom Music Center and the Hudson Library and Historical Society, combining his interest in music and history in the service expected of a top executive. He also serves on the boards of the Kent State University Foundation, Western Reserve Academy and Bexley Hall Seminary.

SEVERAL FORMER Uhrichsville teachers remember Ong as a top student, cooperative and polite. "He would do his work and want to know about extra things," said John Harstine, who taught him algebra and geometry.

"Mostly he read and played piano and trumpet," said his mother, Mrs. Louis B. (Mary) Ong, a Uhrichsville beautician. "He liked to hunt and fish, too."

Ong has tried to share this interest with his sons, although he conceded that the 12 hours he spends each day plus weekend work leaves little time for his family. A Memorial Day fishing trip with Richard, 12, "should have been done years ago," he said. He plans to go hunting with John, 15, this fall.

Ong also has a daughter, Katherine, 11. He said the activities of his three children make it difficult for his wife, the former Mary Lee Schupp of Dennison, to travel with him. She shares his interest in hunting and will go fishing, he added.

ONG HAS BEEN with Goodrich 15 years and is much younger than the presidents whose portraits line the board room adjacent to his office. His comparative youth does not bother him.

"I was always in a situation where I was younger than everybody else in high school and college," he said. "I used to try to act older, but that suddenly changed a few years ago about the age of 40," he added.

Ong looks upon his rise from Goodrich's legal department to the presidency as a series of accidents rather than fulfillment of life-long goals. It has led him to stress flexibility at a time when some management training programs advise young businessmen to set their goals several years in advance.

"Having personal goals is good," he said, "but setting them in detail is not good."

Ong headed for Ohio State University intent upon a career in law and politics and worked his way through school waiting tables at the faculty club. The interest held through Harvard Law School and the Army.

"I planned to practice law somewhere in Ohio and perhaps enter politics," Ong said. He added that such a career was more or less expected of him because of his family's background in law and medicine.

ALTHOUGH POOR eyesight kept him from getting a commission through Ohio State's ROTC program, the Army gave Ong his first taste of law. After two years in intelligence, he received a commission in the judge advocate general corps, serving two years as an Army lawyer.

When he left the Army, Ong read about an opening in Goodrich's legal department in the Ohio State Bar Assn.'s journal. He recalled had not shown much interest in the position and had arranged other interviews while in Akron. Goodrich hired him as assistant general counsel in 1961 and things obviously worked out.

"I have been more effective as a company president than I would have been as a lawyer," Ong said.

Five years in the legal department exposed Ong to international operations and financial affairs, both fields that would prove useful later. They also gave him his first chance for advancement — a choice between assistant treasurer and assistant to the president of Goodrich's international division. He took the latter because it came first.

From 1966 to 1972, Ong was associated with Goodrich's international operations, first as assistant to the international division president, then as division vice president and president in 1971-72. At this point, he knew his career would be tied to Goodrich.

"I HAD SEVERAL opportunities to leave in the late 1960s, which necessitated looking at my career and making

a decision," Ong said. "I concluded that I had a vocation to try to improve the future of the company," he added.

Ong mentioned only two regrets about his decision to remain with Goodrich — the amount of time required for his work and his inability to draw an overseas assignment. Such a post might have come while he was in international operations but never did.

"We schemed to get an overseas assignment in the Army and at Goodrich and never got either," Ong recalled. However, as president of the division, he spent two-thirds of his time in Europe, Africa or Latin America, including one trip of 13 weeks.

Demands on his time were increasing as Ong moved up Goodrich's corporate ladder to his present \$158,000 per year post. "If anybody suffers, it's my family," he said. "I feel often that I neglect them."

ONG'S NEXT STEP up that ladder came in 1972 when he gave up what he thought was "the best job in the company" to become a group vice president with responsibility for the central administrative divisions of controller, employee relations, corporate communications and internal auditing.

"In six months, I thought it was a great job too," said Ong. The group vice presidency brought him a seat on the board of directors in 1973 and its vice chairmanship in 1974, setting the stage for the move to the presidency.

In April 1975 Ong, then 41, became president of the multi-national corpo-

ration, succeeding O. Pendleton Thomas, who also was board chairman and chief executive officer. Thomas, 62, retained his other positions and he and Ong constitute Goodrich's corporate executive office. The other top management officials are the group vice presidents for operations and administration.

Settled into a spacious office on the sixth floor of Goodrich's headquarters in Akron's Opportunity Park, Ong began wrestling with the most difficult part of his first year in office: what was he to do? He explained:

"IN A SMALL company the president is the boss, but in a company like Goodrich, which has 36 to 40 business organizations in six operating divisions, we try to make decisions at the lowest possible level because this fellow deals with the marketplace. Some decisions the president alone can make. I had to determine in what areas I should concentrate to serve the company."

Eventually Ong selected four: planning, senior personnel, corporate finance and promotion of the company. "My No. 1 responsibility is to see to it that Goodrich has a strategic plan for current and future operations," he said.

Ong, who also has offices in Washington and New York, allocates the financial resources of the company to its various businesses according to "broad financial objectives and strategies for their attainment." He seems to be doing a good job.

During the first quarter of 1976, Goodrich increased its sales from \$428.7 million to \$520.6 million. Net income rose from \$3.7 million to \$9.1 million and per-share earnings from 23 to 60 cents. The improvement came after a year in which Goodrich saw its earnings drop 52 per cent to \$25.6 million while sales went up 3 per cent to \$1.9 billion.

ONG RANKED personnel work second in importance to planning. "I spend a good percentage of my time worrying about people problems," he said.

In filling senior positions, Ong looks for people who fit into the company's plans, matching the person and the job. He is concerned about replacing promoted executives and the training of future John Ongs.

"We have to plan for development to get and hold good people, giving them a broad range of experience in company operations and preparing them to be president," he said.

Ong's concern for the financial affairs of Goodrich is a part of his effort "to lend a hand with any particular aspect of management" when needed. He meets with security analysts and institutional investors to tell them about the company and its prospects, which he believes are improving.

"Goodrich is a 106-year-old company with a good reputation for its products and financial position, but it hasn't always performed up to potential," Ong said. "We are trying to change a great many things, looking at our operations, entering some fields and strengthening

others," he added.

ONG DESCRIBED his fourth duty as "showing the flag or making state visits" at Goodrich plants around the world. He or Thomas try to visit each major facility at least once a year.

"These trips give us a feel for the operation not available on the sixth floor of this building," Ong said. "They maintain high morale among employees by showing them that corporate officials are concerned."

In addition to his responsibilities at Goodrich and in several philanthropic groups, Ong has become a director of several business groups with the encouragement of his company. He is a member of the boards of Cooper Industries Inc., the Kroger Co., the Rubber Manufacturers Assn. and the Highway Users Federation for Safety and Mobility.

These positions are a mixed blessing, Ong said. They carry heavy responsibilities, especially the seats on the Kroger and Cooper Industries boards, but they show him different management styles. "I get more than I give because I'm always listening and learning," he added.

HE SEEMS TO relish his work as a company president, although he sometimes finds it frustrating. "We had an old resident in Uhrichsville who used to say, 'Nothin' good ain't ever easy,'" he said to explain what it is like to head a major corporation at a time when business frequently is criticized.

Ong said he once commented to a friend during a frustrating moment that he hoped his sons did not follow him into business and he still is not certain whether he would recommend such a career to them. "I don't know that I would discourage them," he added.

Earlier Goodrich presidents would be surprised by the things that preoccupy Ong, who is the 12th to hold the office. "They wouldn't have arisen," he said of problems unique to his administration.

One is the strike by the United Rubber Workers, which Ong said in advance of The Times-Reporter interview he would not discuss. Another is the revelation during the annual shareholders meeting in April that Goodrich employees were involved in several questionable overseas payments totaling \$124,000 between 1971-75. The employees have been disciplined or dismissed.

"WE ARE CONTINUING our investigation of corporate payments like other companies," Ong said. "We are looking everywhere to detect what has been done in the past," he added.

Ong said the company made an initial report to the Securities Exchange Commission and would file another if there were subsequent developments. "Normal SEC requirements wouldn't have required reporting, but the rule of rationality has gone out the window," he added.

The Goodrich president said many current business problems would not have existed 10 years ago. He pointed out that the complex major corporations have attracted attention because of their size. "Everybody has a stake in business decisions," he added.

Ong observed: "The larger companies are at a pivotal point between the traditional drives that made our country and opposing forces turning the country more into a society where major decisions are made in the public sector rather than in the marketplace."

If Ong's sons follow him into business, they will find it different, he noted. "It will be tougher, more frustrating and less rewarding for people in management," he predicted. Ong added:

"I would say they will have different times and challenging situations to face. They may have to operate a company differently."



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(Photos by Bob Lauriha)