

Martin Borchert

Following a 20 year career with Acme Brick Company where he rose from a 19 year old bookkeeping apprentice to a division sales manager – and four years as a B-17 bomber pilot during World War II – Mr. Borchert opened the Martin Borchert Company in 1960 and ASCO Hardware Company in 1970, both suppliers to the specialized needs of the construction industry.

In 1962, Mr. Borchert served as vice chairman of the State Planning Commission and in 1964 he sought and won a position on the Little Rock City Board where he quickly earned a reputation as an outspoken, honest and progressive member.

In 1966 the city directors elected Mr. Borchert Mayor of Little Rock for a two-year term. Using his combination of financial and political savvy, he continually tackled difficult situations head on – a talent which would later put him on the staffs of Governor Dale Bumpers and Governor Bill Clinton.

Although the role of Mayor was then considered largely ceremonial, Mr. Borchert's belief and enthusiasm for the importance of urban renewal and downtown revitalization brought him and Little Rock to the attention of the nation.

During Borchert's mayorship, no less than 11 major construction projects were started or continued in downtown Little Rock. A feature story in the March 27, 1967 *Shreveport Journal* reporting on Mayor Borchert's speech to city's business and civic leaders noted that Little Rock was on of the two largest and most successful urban renewal projects in America. Said Borchert, "...Little Rock, utilizing \$85 million in federal and local funds, has provided impetus for private investments of \$500 million."

Mayor Borchert told the Shreveport audience how Little Rock's business leaders formed an Urban Progress Association that worked closely with the city's homebuilder association, board of realtors and chamber of commerce. Federal funds were used to improve streets, curbs, gutters and storm drainage. The Little Rock Housing Authority purchased property with federal aid and then resold it to private developers.

"Urban renewal projects, redevelopment and rehabilitation," he continued, "resulted in a 700% increase in the tax yield of the properties in the project areas. In one section, a \$5 million development yielded a 1,240 per cent tax increase on that section." Mayor Borchert also noted that urban revitalization had motivated many existing industries to expand and while attracting new companies and private development.

As both a civic leader and construction industry profession, Martin Borchert – perhaps more than anyone else in the city government – understood how those two spheres could combine to change the face and spirit of Little Rock. The power of his influence and the support of the city's other civic and business leaders resulted in unprecedented growth, employment and revitalization which are still being seen and felt today.

Following Mr. Borchert's successful term as Little Rock mayor, he returned to running the Martin Borchert Company. In 1970 he joined the campaign staff of Dale Bumpers. Following Mr. Bumpers' election as governor in 1971, Mr. Borchert served as legislative liaison, head of political appointments and as a finance chairman where he continued to hone his economic and political skills. During this time, the construction industry continued to grow and flourish based largely on the projects started in the last several years.

1970 was also the year Mr. Borchert, along with Phil Pierini and Lara Hutt, founded ASCO Hardware Company, a small specialized company supplying contract hardware to commercial builders. The single employee of the company was Jim Russenburger who is now the president of the company.

In 1979 another Arkansas governor would seek out Martin Borchert's contracting expertise, enthusiasm and skills. After serving on Bill Clinton's campaign staff, the young governor appointed Mr. Borchert the Director of State Building Services (SBS). The SBS was responsible for the construction and maintenance of all state buildings with the exception of the state capitol building itself.

In 1981 Mr. Borchert returned full time to his construction business. In 1987 his financial skills were again needed and he was named chairman of the troubled Metroplan Transit Policy Board. In 1986 he helped the Transit Board transfer its power and authority to a newly formed countywide transit board known as Central Arkansas Transit Authority (CATA).

While Mr. Borchert would soon retire from public service at age 72, he continued to manage his construction supply companies. Over a period of years he transferred ownership of the Martin Borchert Company to two long-term employees. He remains Chairman of the Board of ASCO Hardware Company which has grown to 38 employees with a warehouse facility of over 40,000 square feet. It serves architects, engineers and general contractors with specifications, estimates and field service.