

Dennis R. Washington, Founder



Dennis Washington was born in Spokane, Washington in 1934 but moved with his family back to his mother's hometown of Missoula, Montana, when he was very young. "Like a lot of people back in the 1930s, we didn't have a lot of money," he says, "but my parents were good people. My mother was a very loving person, and my father was a tough, strong guy."

When World War II broke out his parents migrated to Bremerton, Washington, seeking and finding work at a defense shipyard. Living in a government housing project, Washington contracted polio when he was eight. Fortunately, he made a good recovery.

Following the war, Washington's parents divorced. He bounced around California, Washington, and Montana, living with relatives and going from one school to another. By the age of 14, he was self-sufficient, earning money by boxing groceries, delivering newspapers, shining shoes at a railroad depot, and working as a mechanic in a service station. During his final two years in high school he lived with his grandmother in Missoula. "She gave me love and stability at a time in my life when I really needed it," he says. "She believed in me and my dreams and my desires."

After high school Washington went to Alaska to pursue a job in heavy construction. Two years later he returned to Montana and worked for his uncle who owned a construction company. By age 26 he was vice president of the largest construction company in Montana. Three years later, with a loan from a Caterpillar dealer, Washington went into business for himself. His first contract was a challenging one carving a parking lot at the rocky summit of Glacier National Park. Forest road building work led to interstate highway construction jobs. By 1969 he was the largest contractor in Montana; within ten years Washington Construction would be listed among the largest in the nation.

In the early 1970s Washington branched into mining. A daring purchase of a dormant copper mine in Butte, Montana brought that mine back into profitable production in 1986 and provided

resources for other expansion. He diversified repeatedly, entering into dam building, railroads, and marine shipping. "It's all possible because of teamwork," he says, "and people with a passion for their work".

In 1996 Washington Construction merged with Morrison Knudsen, a publicly traded construction and engineering giant. After the merger, Washington directed formation of Washington Group International, acquiring components of Westinghouse and Raytheon, to mold one of the largest design/build construction companies in the U.S. His other private businesses, the Washington Companies, comprise over a dozen affiliated companies, including the largest privately owned railroad in the U.S. and one of the largest marine transportation companies in Canada.

An ardent philanthropist, Washington established the Dennis & Phyllis Washington Foundation in 1988. Focused on education, health and human services, community service, and arts and culture, it has contributed to organizations in Montana and throughout the nation. Washington believes strongly that by reaching out to young people in their formative years and by presenting opportunity to the disadvantaged, our society will see great benefit. "Every person will get a break at some time in their life," says Washington, "but not everyone will recognize it or have ability to use it. The best you can do is be prepared."