

Order of BC for engineer

From a small boy in an internment camp to B.C.'s premier mega-project engineer

**BY MIKE MCQUILLAN
NEWSLEADER STAFF**

Henry Wakabayashi spent Thursday among some of B.C.'s most elite and best known British Columbians. He and 14 others received the Order of British Columbia, the province's highest award.

The 66-year-old Burnaby resident was chosen for the work he has done in the fields of engineering and project management.

Almost 60 years ago he was chosen for another reason.

Around the age of seven Wakabayashi, his three siblings and their mother were escorted to a Japanese-Canadian internment camp — where Hastings Park now sits. They were separated from their father who was taken away to work camp in the Kamloops area.

It was, said Wakabayashi, a traumatic experience for those older than him. For him it further ingrained the racism he felt growing up.

"When I was young, I'd go to bed at night wishing I



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Mega-project engineer Henry Wakabayashi of Burnaby received the Order of BC Thursday at a ceremony held at the Government House in Victoria.

would wake up with a Caucasian face. The pain was obviously there," said Wakabayashi.

But like all successful people, he turned the negatives into positives.

After the internment, he went on to the University of B.C. and received his degree in Chemical Engineering. His first job was with Mitsubishi and he got a big break in 1958 when he was given the job of being a project engineer to build a \$40 million pulp mill in Cranbrook, a joint venture between Mitsubishi and

Crestbrook Forest Industries.

Wakabayashi credits the guidance of his boss Hiro Minagawa for his success. "All of us engineers came out [of university] and had a really narrow vision. [Minagawa] said he would take me on and teach me about business."

From there it was one large project after another. When he saw there was no room for advancement through the ranks of Mitsubishi, Wakabayashi went his own way and formed the company he now heads — Pacific Liaison and Associates, located in Burnaby.

Since then he and his company have played the lead roles in developments like the Peace River Pulp Mill Project, the first phase of SkyTrain, North East Coal Development in Tumbler Ridge, the first phase of the Greater Vancouver Water District Drinking Water Treatment Project, the expansion of Vancouver International Airport, the demolition and disposal of Expo 86 and many other major undertakings.

Wakabayashi's company has built projects totally more than \$6 billion over the last 30 years. In that time, they've only had to bid for one project. On all the other projects they were chosen because they're able to meet deadlines and budgets.

Wakabayashi's secret: Start with a plan that details the undertaking and establishes interim milestone dates that break the major project up into smaller ones. "Do everything you can to meet those deadlines," he said.

He's also not fond of hiring the lowest bidder but prefers to retain those with the experience that you can rely on.

Despite his convictions about the sanctity of deadlines, Wakabayashi hasn't established one for his retirement. "I'm having too much fun doing what I'm doing."