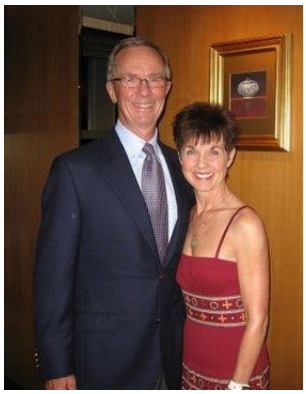
BORN LUCKY: The John and Bunny Ferguson Story

By Michael Kryton



They have both climbed Mt. Kilimanjaro, received Honorary Doctorate of Laws Degrees from the University of Alberta, been awarded the Alberta Centennial Medal and are both members of the Order of Canada. After 45 years of marriage, three sons and daughters in law, and 6 grandchildren, John and Bunny Ferguson continue to prove that when you go through life with passion and enthusiasm as if your life depended on it, you'll be amazed at how lucky you'll be.

Born and raised in Edmonton, John and Bunny Ferguson met in 1965. John, a Commerce graduate from the University of Alberta seeking his Chartered Accountant designation, worked as an articling student for Price Waterhouse doing an audit at Imperial Oil where Bunny was employed. By July of 1966, Bunny and John were married and John, having completed his articling, was plying his skill at the Oxford Development Group working with Don Love.

In the early 70s, Bill McGregor, founder of Numac Oil & Gas, invited the young 28 year old CA to accept a position as Chief Financial Officer of the company. In 1972, John and Bill expanded Numac's vision to include real estate and began building Petroleum Plaza north of the Legislature. Bill appointed John as the President of the newly formed real estate company, Nu-Alta Developments. With oil markets strengthening, Numac's focus shifted back from real estate to oil and gas; but John, who preferred real estate, began to wrestle with his future.

Meanwhile, Bunny began to build her career as a community leader throughout the 70s. By the end of the decade, she had established herself as a one of Edmonton's most productive and up and coming volunteers, serving many committees and assuming leadership roles within organizations and events ranging from the Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants National Conference to the United Way, St. Albert Residential campaign.

Having seen Don Love start Oxford, and Bill McGregor start Numac, John felt the time was right for him to establish his own company. Following discussions with Don Carlson, John Schlosser and John Slatter, John had the necessary funds to start his own company, Princeton Developments. It was 1975, and Princeton was off to a strong start. Princeton expanded rapidly in the late 70's. In 1976, the Princeton project roster included the development of 30 acres of land in Northwest Edmonton, a multi phased master plan. Soon after, Princeton was approached to develop a special purpose building in Edmonton for the Smith Kline Corporation out of Philadelphia. But it was John's vision for the north, specifically Yellowknife that fuelled Princeton's evolution as a development company. Bellanca Developments was created to develop various parcels of land in the northern capital.

Over the next 15 years, the commercial real estate industry became more dominated by institutional investors and less entrepreneurial. During this time, John decided to sell the real estate portfolio of properties in stages…often near the top of the market.

For the past 4 decades the Fergusons have been very familiar faces in many corners of business and community involvement. Bunny has distinguished herself with many organizations and serving many roles including President of Canadian Cancer Society, Edmonton Unit, Founding Director of the Alberta Performing Arts Stabilization Fund, Chairman of the Winspear Centre Opening, the Director of the founding bid committee for the IAAF World Track and Field Championships, the Director of Ronald MacDonald House, the Director of the Edmonton Oilers Community Foundation, the Vice-Chair of the Lois Hole Hospital for Women Campaign and many more.

John has served as Chair of the United Way Major Corporate Division, Edmonton fundraising campaign, director for the Family Service Association of Edmonton and Finance Chair on the Edmonton Chamber of Commerce. In 2010 John was asked to serve as the Honorary Lt. Col. of the South Alberta Light Horse regiment, a role he has been proud to fulfill in support of the brave men and women risking their lives while serving Canada.

Both John and Bunny have remained intricately involved with the University of Alberta.

Perhaps one of the most compelling stories about John and Bunny's commitment to philanthropy involves their quest to climb the highest mountain in Africa --- Mt. Kilimanjaro. The Kilimanjaro Climb 2011 team of 28 people including John and Bunny reached Uhuru Peak, the summit of Mount Kilimanjaro in August of 2011. It was one of the most unique fundraising campaigns in the Royal Alexandra Hospital Foundation's history.

Between the needs of the community and the demands of industry, the Fergusons continue to prevail. While Bunny continues to steer the vision for a better community through her foundation commitments, John is a Director of the Royal Bank of Canada and is at the helm of Canada's largest energy company as the Chair of the Board for Suncor Energy.

For John and Bunny, it is a continuing story that embraces commitment and passion --- a commitment and passion that keeps the Northern Lights burning with distinction.