In 1996, Jack B. Parson Jr. sat at the head of the negotiating table across from executives of Atlanta-based materials giant Oldcastle, Inc., meticulously weighing the pros and cons of selling his family’s 44-year-old ready-mix/construction empire.

For Parson, who turns 83 in October, the decision wasn’t as simple as a final, bottom line number. He said he had conversations with long-time industry associate and friend Val Staker, who had sold Staker Paving to Oldcastle the previous year and dealt with then Oldcastle CEO Tom Hill. Parson wanted an absolute assurance from Hill that the company would continue operating in essentially the same manner as it had since his father founded Jack B. Parson Companies in 1952 in the tiny northern Utah town of Smithfield. That meant continuing the family name, and providing long-term career opportunities for employees, including sons John and Scott (now prominent executives of Oldcastle Materials).

“They’ve done well to keep their word,” said Parson, who remained President of JBP until it merged with Staker Paving in 2001 to form Staker Parson Companies. “Tom was a good salesman. His goal was to acquire companies and leave them in place, which I had heard before. It’s been a good thing.”

Deep Family Construction Roots
Jack Parson Sr. was just 15 in 1926 when he caught a train north to Dubois, Idaho to build roads with his father, Edward Axel (EA) Parson, a foreman for Olaf Nelson Construction of Logan. Parson Sr. spent several years with Olaf Nelson before venturing out on his own and started Jack B. Parson Companies in Smithfield, Utah.

Parson Jr. was just 17 when JBP began, and he moved into a full-time role after getting married in 1954, doing field work, estimating, project management – anything that was needed. He recalled one experience landing a key job in the early 60s, which boosted his own confidence and proved to be a boon financially for the company.

“Okland Construction was building the first IRS facility in Ogden and I remember going out and watching Okland dig footings just west of our 12th Street plant,” said Parson. “I went over and talked to (founder) Mr. (John) Okland, we shot the breeze for a minute, and I told him ‘we’d really like to work with you on this project’. It was my job to talk to the head guy; I felt driven, knowing we had to go get this job to meet the bottom line.”

Through the years, the company experienced the cyclical ups and downs of the industry, but plowed through difficult times, made sound investments during good times, and ultimately built itself into one of the Intermountain region’s leading materials suppliers (aggregates, asphalt, ready-mix concrete) and heavy-highway contractors.

“My dad had a lot of faith in himself,” said Parson. “He had tremendous drive, a great rapport with people, and self-confidence. He was good at meeting the right people.”

Putting People First
Beyond his far-reaching influence at JBP/Staker Parson, Parson believed firmly in putting people first – clients, employees, even industry competitors. He spent many years helping champion the industry through service with the Associated General Contractors (AGC) of Utah. Parson served as a long-time board member, was elected President (now Chair) in 1994, and ultimately earned the distinction as a national Lifetime Director for the chapter, one of only a handful of people to achieve this title.

“Jack Parson Jr. ranks among the industry titans,” said Rich Thorn,
Industry Legends

President/CEO of the AGC of Utah “He has influenced people from the top of the state to the bottom, and he’s been on both ends of the shovel. He brought a temperament to meetings that required people to put their best foot forward in highly stressful situations.

“He’s the quintessential gentleman contractor,” Thorn added. “People tried to emulate what Jack did. His legacy will be felt for years.”

“I always recognized about dad, he was always completely straight up honest about everything,” said John Parson, President of Staker Parson Companies and Oldcastle Material West Division. “I’ve had a number of customers talk about dark days with their business during hard economic times, dad was willing to work out payment terms which allowed them to stay in business. Those types of approaches were innovative at the time.

“Another thing I took from my dad was he was very involved in the AGC, and that inspired me to engage and give of my time to meetings that required people to put their best foot forward in highly stressful situations.

I know one thing my father would be proud of is the family name carrying on.

“He always puts people first, whether it was employees or customers,” echoed Scott Parson, President of Staker Parson Companies and Oldcastle Materials West Division. “I’ve had a number of customers talk about dark days with their business during hard economic times, dad was willing to work out payment terms which allowed them to stay in business. Those types of approaches were innovative at the time.

It allowed our customers to thrive and our approaches were innovative at the time.

“I always recognized about dad, he was always completely straight up honest about everything,” said John Parson, President of Staker Parson Companies and Oldcastle Material West Division. “I’ve had a number of customers talk about dark days with their business during hard economic times, dad was willing to work out payment terms which allowed them to stay in business. Those types of approaches were innovative at the time.

Another thing I took from my dad was he was very involved in the AGC, and that inspired me to engage and give of my time to meetings that required people to put their best foot forward in highly stressful situations.

“I know one thing my father would be proud of is the family name carrying on.

“He always puts people first, whether it was employees or customers,” echoed Scott Parson, President of Staker Parson Companies and Oldcastle Materials West Division. “I’ve had a number of customers talk about dark days with their business during hard economic times, dad was willing to work out payment terms which allowed them to stay in business. Those types of approaches were innovative at the time.

Another thing I took from my dad was he was very involved in the AGC, and that inspired me to engage and give of my time to meetings that required people to put their best foot forward in highly stressful situations.

I know one thing my father would be proud of is the family name carrying on.