

Thousands gather to remember Les Schwab

by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources

About 4,500 people gathered Thursday in Redmond to remember and honor local businessman, community leader, philanthropist, and icon Les Schwab who, after many months of declining health, passed away May 18 at the age of 89.

(above) Les Schwab wrote *Pride in Performance* in 1986, (below) Visitors, numbering in the thousands, leave the memorial service - Photos by Karen Cammack for Les Schwab Tire Centers The memorial service was held at 2 p.m. in the Hooker Creek Events Center of the Redmond County Fairgrounds.

Schwab started his company in 1952, and built Les Schwab Tire Centers into one of Oregon's best-known businesses. The company now operates more than 410 stores throughout the West, with 7,700 employees.

“Les was not just a great businessman, he was a great man,” said Phil Wick, Chairman of Les Schwab Tire Centers. “There will never be another Les. He was a visionary, and all of us who worked with him will stay true to his vision of integrity, service and treating people right.”

Schwab was born in Bend in 1917 and graduated from Bend High School. Both of his parents died when he was 15 and still in high school, and he supported himself by distributing the Oregon Journal newspaper and eventually controlled all nine routes in Bend.

Schwab married his high school sweetheart, Dorothy Harlan, shortly after graduating high school. After working his way up at the Oregon Journal, he left to become circulation manager at The Bulletin in Bend.

He served in World War II with the Air Cadets, then in 1952, he bought OK Rubber Welders in Prineville, Oregon, starting in a shack of a building with no running water and no toilet. "I had one hired man, and the two of us were the total crew. So I learned the tire business from the bottom up." Schwab said.

Schwab often said, "There are three types of people in the world: those who make things happen, those who watch things happen, and those who ask what happened." Les Schwab was a man who made things happen.

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