

CURRENTS

NEW DEVELOPMENTS IN SYNTHETIC ROPE TECHNOLOGY

TONY BON: From Yarn Handler to CEO

January of 2017 saw the retirement of one of the veterans of the Samson family. Tony Bon, CEO through 2015 retired as of December 31, 2016.

Currents sat down with Tony to get his impressions of the time he's been with Samson and the high points of both the company and the industry it serves. In the Navy they have an expression to describe a captain that moves up through the ranks: "He came up through the hawse pipes." Tony's journey to the corner office at Samson is a similar story.

In 1974, after leaving Berklee College of Music in Boston, Tony needed a job. He was about to start work at a tannery (a job he says would have been horrible, at best), when an opportunity arose at the Samson plant in Shirley, Massachusetts. He'd heard it was a good company with a reputation for taking care of its employees so he applied for the job. Starting as a yarn handler on the factory floor, a position he recalls as the lowest paying position in the plant at the time, he moved quickly to production supervisor for the twisting department, then shift superintendent. He took on the role of special projects manager to set up the company's first computerized bills of materials (BoMs) system.

"I remember when Tony first started with Samson in 1974. I guess you could classify him at that time as kind of a beatnik; long hair, beard and into music. Talk about a Horatio Alger story: he starts as a bobbin boy and retires as CEO. Some politicians say the American Dream is over...well they should know the Tony Bon story..."

STEVE SWIACKEY—former CEO, Samson



samson
THE STRONGEST NAME IN ROPE

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SPECIAL EDITION: Tony Bon retires after 42 years with Samson

In 1980, Tony was sent to Ferndale to take over as plant manager. The Ferndale plant had been set up with the mission to serve the Pacific Northwest fishing industry. It was 35,000 square feet and employed about 35 people. Always willing to serve the company where they needed him, Tony returned to Shirley in 1985 to manage both plants. Then, in 1987, when the decision to consolidate the two plants was made, Tony returned to western Washington to set up and prepare the new company headquarters.

In the following years Tony advanced through the organization with several different positions such as Materials Manager, COO, was named company president in 2007, and assumed the role of CEO in 2013. In 2016, Tony completed his tenure at Samson with a year spent as Advisor to the new President and CEO, Andrea Sturm.

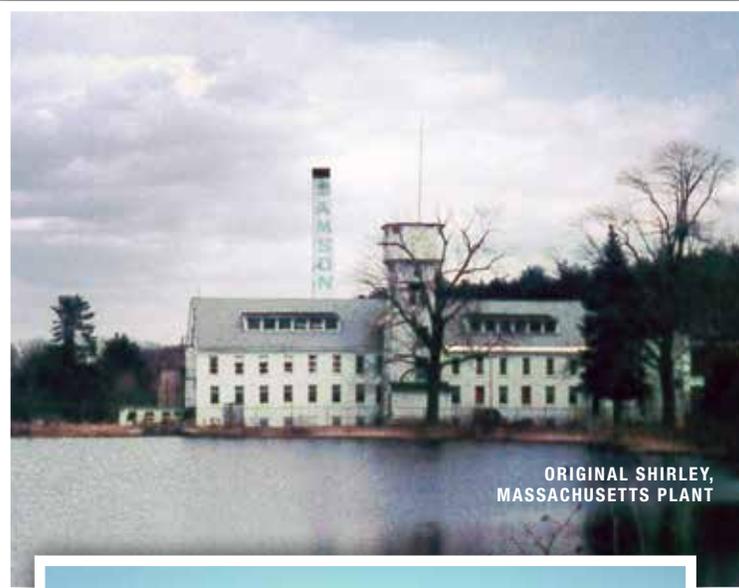
“Tony left a legacy at Samson and within the cordage industry. He should be proud of his achievements. It was a pleasure to work with Tony by my side during my first year, both because of his experience and knowledge of the industry....and because he is a great person to be with!”

ANDREA STURM—President & CEO, Samson

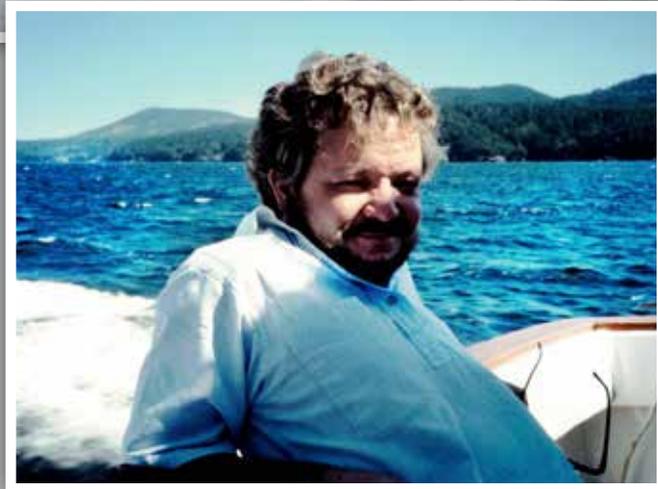
EVOLUTION OF THE SAMSON BRAND DURING THE BON TENURE

Since joining the Samson family in 1974, Tony has seen many changes. In 1976 the name was changed to Samson Ocean Systems, and two years later was acquired by Enserch. 1988 saw Samson Ocean Systems acquired by the management team. It was then that the modern era of Samson really began. The company was consolidated and the headquarters moved to Ferndale, Washington. The plant in Anniston, Alabama was expanded while engineering, test labs and large rope manufacturing came to Ferndale. 1993 saw the merging of Samson Ocean Systems, AMCO and Herzog Ropes into The American Group—the worldwide leader in the engineering and manufacture of high performance rope. In 2001 the company returned to its roots and was renamed Samson Rope Technologies.

Through all the changes, Samson has continuously advanced the state of the art in high-performance rope design and development. The opening of the Innovation Center in 2013—15,000 square feet devoted to research and development—is just the latest statement reinforcing Samson’s commitment to innovation, which has guided the organization since founder J.P. Tolman patented his improved switch braider in 1878.



ORIGINAL SHIRLEY,
MASSACHUSETTS PLANT



▲ A younger Tony enjoying the open water of the Pacific Northwest.



▲ FROM LEFT: Tony, Michael Michael Quinn, Director New Business Development and Andrea Sturm, President & CEO, Samson.



LAFAYETTE, LOUISIANA TEAM



▲ Tony (left) at Rio Tinto Mine MTW in Newcastle, Australia. Prospector (Dump Rope) on the drag line machine.



▲ Tony with Andrea Sturm at Lafayette plant.

TONY TELLS THE STORY OF SAMSON'S PLACE IN THE INDUSTRY: INNOVATION LEADER

When Tony first started at the Shirley plant, he was fortunate to work with Ken Fogden, the Samson engineer who invented the double-braided rope. Introduced in 1957, it was a pivotal innovation that changed the industry. Synthetic fibers had overtaken the natural fibers that had dominated the cordage industry for generations, and the new double-braid construction made the most of the potential that nylon, polyester, and the olefins brought to the industry. This innovation cemented Samson's already acknowledged industry leadership in both engineering and technology.

"We are an innovation leader. We pioneered double-braided synthetic ropes—replacing 3-strand ropes and natural fibers in a number of industries. We had established a track record of breaking new ground," Tony said.

In the 1970s and 80s, Samson leveraged the knowledge and experience it had gained as an early innovator in synthetic fiber and pioneered the use of newly introduced high-performance fibers in cordage products. Pairing these new fibers—first aramids and then high modulus polyethylene (HMPE)—with a single-braid, 12-strand construction created a new industry standard that is still a top-performing product today.

"The business has grown beyond just products—the technology, the fibers and the constructions. The key components of the value proposition are all the extras we bring to the sale. The data we bring to the customer, the service programs we provide—all those things we call The Samson Advantage—that help the customer get real value from the product," he noted. "It's a dedicated focus on the customer-centric strategy, innovation and always making sure we're walking the talk. We want to innovate not just in product but in everything we do—from lean manufacturing on the plant floor to service programs, even our marketing programs reflect that dedication."

SPECIAL EDITION: Tony Bon retires after 42 years with Samson

SAMSON'S CORPORATE CULTURE; THE ROLE OF LEADERSHIP, AND WHERE WE GO FROM HERE

On the company's leadership philosophy, Tony commented: *"I hope we've built a culture that's less dependent on the individual leader. It's what Rafael (Dr. Rafael Chou, vice president of development) discusses as the transition in a company's leadership, culture and growth from entrepreneurial leadership to management. I think that's the stage we're at. One of the strengths of Samson's culture, values, and strategy is that it functions almost independent of the leadership. So, whether it's me, or any other leader, the leadership is, to some extent, a caretaker's role; breaking down obstacles enabling the people to do their jobs and carry the strategy forward."*

The keys to Samson's success *"...Are pioneering in new industries, like the crane market, continuing to explore the adjacencies within existing markets and investigating new industries where we can be replacing commodity synthetics or steel wire ropes while staying focused on the service that allows customers to get full value from their investment. It allows them to have a good experience, cradle to grave."*

"I always come back to the people I work with. Samson has such a strong culture of integrity, passion, and commitment to the business, along with a loyalty to our people. We've had a lot of good people over the years. It makes it fun to come to work."

WHAT'S NEXT FOR TONY

As of January 1, 2017, Tony stopped coming to work on a daily basis. While he's retired as Samson's CEO, he will be serving on Samson's board of directors, so don't be surprised to see him once in a while. As for the future beyond Samson, Tony has plans to continue his participation in several non-profits in the area, has been asked to participate on an advisory board for the school of business at Western Washington University, and is looking forward to spending some time travelling with his wife—just for the fun and adventure of it for a change.

And, if there's still some open time to fill, there's a stack of books that's been accumulating, a dusty ukulele he'd like to learn to coax a tune from, and a few old turntables to rebuild as part of his audio hobby.

We thank Tony for his unselfish commitment, unwavering loyalty to the people of Samson, and for continuing to carry the torch and vision of J.P. Tolman making Samson The Strongest Name in Rope. Please join us in wishing Tony pleasant travels and an amazing retirement.



2015 SALES MEETING, ARIZONA



Chris Ashworth, Managing Director, Mainbrace Marine Limited, presenting Tony with a Bell Rope in recognition of Samson's partnership with them and the Royal Navy.



Tony's bon voyage! The Samson plant employees providing Tony with well wishes and fond farewell.

