



# FSMS Pioneers

*A series that honors the legends of surveying in the state of Florida*

By Dominic Levings

## Charles Fred Deuel III

*With professional integrity and personal generosity, Deuel helped his hometown evolve*

A resident of St. Petersburg for nine decades, Charles Fred Deuel III has seen the city that was once a small railroad town morph into a vibrant hub exploding with development.

“He never believed he’d see the day where there were three cranes in downtown St. Petersburg at the same time,” his daughter, Tracy, said.

“He’s got a lot of old pictures where there’s nothing at the beach.”

But then again, Deuel certainly knows that he played no small role in transforming the city.

Over his 55-year career as a surveyor and engineer, Fred Deuel contributed his time and effort to numerous developments in St. Petersburg and established a name and reputation that is now well-known throughout the city.

Born on February 24<sup>th</sup>, 1927, Deuel

grew up in St. Petersburg and attended St. Pete High, the only high school in the area at the time. After high school, he attended the Colorado School of Mines in Denver. His grandfather had been a mining engineer and encouraged him to consider attending the school.

“When it came time to go to school, I thought I would like to go out there and my folks made it possible,” Deuel recalled.

Deuel graduated with a degree in mining engineering. However, it was during his time at the Colorado School of Mines that he was first exposed to the possibility of becoming a professional surveyor.

“One of my fraternity brothers told me, ‘If I could make a living surveying, that’s what I would do,’” Deuel said.

That idea stuck with Deuel, and a few years after moving back home to St. Petersburg after college, he

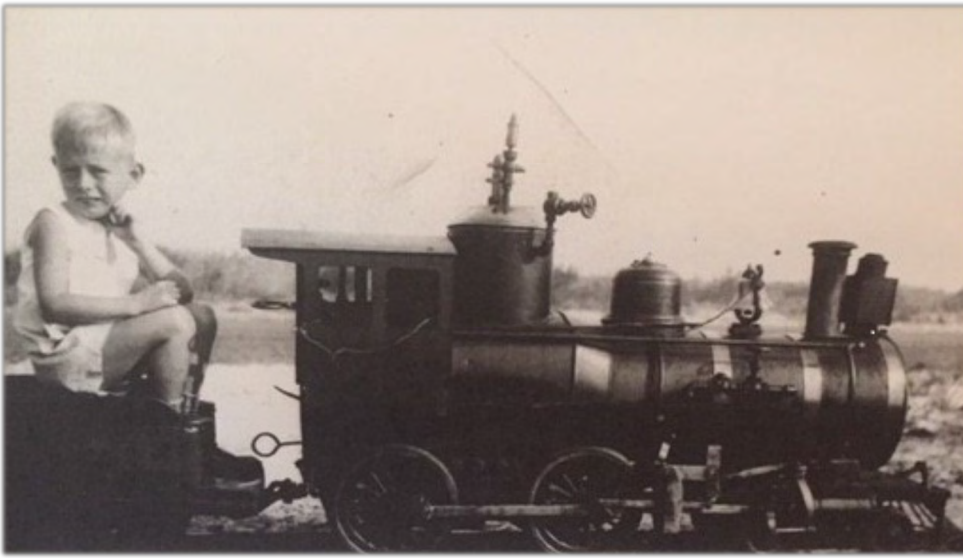
obtained his official survey license on March 26<sup>th</sup>, 1951. The rest, they say, is history.

### The Boom Days of Florida

Deuel’s first surveying job was with George F. Young, a prominent Florida surveyor who oversaw many projects in the central and southern parts of the state throughout the mid-1900s. When Deuel began working for him in the early 1950’s, a development and construction boom was well underway in Florida, and subdivisions and townships sprouted up throughout the state.

Young was one of a handful of surveyors of the time who could accurately calculate a new type of suburb layout: curve-drive subdivisions.

“Back in those days, there weren’t a lot of people who did curve-drive subdivisions,” Deuel said. “George had a hand in it because no one



*It was evident from early on that Fred Deuel would become a surveyor and engineer.*

else knew how to calculate curves.”

And so, the young Deuel learned from one of the surveying luminaries of the state, and soon became an excellent calculator of curve-drives himself. His first years as a surveyor were mostly spent in the office, making calculations longhand.

“I used to have a book of log tables from the government to do all of my calculations, and an old Monroe adding machine was my calculator,” Deuel recalled.

He still remembers his first major project with Young, back when St. Petersburg was still a tiny Florida town. It was Tyrone Gardens, the sort of shopping mall that became a symbol of America’s post-war boom in the 1950’s. Within time, this project would be just one of many that Deuel would have a hand in developing.

### **C. Fred Deuel and Associates**

Deuel eventually went into business with a colleague of his at Young, Gordon Day. Their firm was named Deuel & Day and served the St. Petersburg area. After Day moved to North Florida to work with relatives, Deuel decided to keep the company open and operate it alone.

C. Fred Deuel and Associates was founded in 1954. With a relaxed

management style and a dedication to abiding by ethical standards, he built his company into a formidable enterprise. At one point, he had additional offices in Ocala, Clearwater, New Port Richey, Zephyrhills, and Hudson, as well as over 100 employees.

“He loved his work and put everything into it. He treated everyone fairly, and he was compassionate, and he had employees who he treated well. He gave everybody a fair shake,” Tracy said.

Tracy remembers that his commitment to the job often extended beyond the work day and work week. Along with her sisters, Lynn and Leslie, she would often accompany her father to look at projects on the weekends.

“He loved to drive around and look at his jobs. He would maybe check something out, or if he needed to, would measure something,” she said.

She also remembers that his job resulted in the adoption of more than a few pets at their house when they were younger.

“We remember having tortoises because him and his crews would find them out in the field and bring them home, and we’d have them as

pets,” she said, laughing.

Walt Casson, Jr. first met Deuel in the summer of 1954. Casson’s father owned a surveying firm in New Port Richey, and after his father passed away unexpectedly, Casson leased the company to Deuel. Casson would work for Deuel for several years, and he recalls the unrelenting integrity of his former boss.

“He was a professional in all respects. He was a registered engineer and surveyor. He had the highest ethics,” Casson said.

“This was before minimum technical standards existed. We developed our own code of ethics – the state didn’t have anything to do with it – it was just our company.”

Harley Gilmore also met and began working for Deuel in 1954. Gilmore identified Deuel’s ethical standards as one of his defining qualities, sometimes going so far as to spend money to correct a previous survey that wasn’t done right.

“I do know of some cases when I was working for him, that it was determined later that the survey wasn’t done right, and he spent the money and the time to correct it and make it right,” Gilmore said.

“He never did a job half-way and said, ‘Well, they’ll forget about it, I’m not making any money.’ He



*Deuel with his old Monroe adding machine, which he used early in his career. He is wearing a Colorado School of Mines shirt.*



*Deuel with a transit in the late 1940's.*

solid day-by-day surveyor. We have some who are book surveyors but weren't in the field – he would be out there when needed, supervising the field crew through the job itself," Gilmore recalled.

"He was involved and well respected by everyone," Casson said.

### **"He's Just a Good Guy"**

Aside from his easy-going demeanor as a boss and his friendly personality, those who know him best say that Fred Deuel is an exceptionally generous man with a big heart.

Casson remembers that after the death of his father, his family was struggling to make ends meet. He was planning to go back to college at Vanderbilt, but considered staying home to support his mother and his three younger siblings – that is, until Deuel stepped in.

"Mother had never done anything but take care of the family. How was she going to support the family and me go off to college?" Casson said. "Mr. Deuel hired my mother as his receptionist, and she was taken care of."

In 1963, after several years working for Deuel in the New Port Richey office, Casson was ready to go his own way. But his devotion to Deuel was causing him distress.

"Then I started wanting to be in business for myself. But I didn't want to hurt Deuel's feelings – he had been so good to me after all," Casson said.

However, the saga would end well, albeit in a coincidental fashion. By chance, Deuel was ready to scale back operations, and closed the New Port Richey office. The office closed on a Friday, and Casson opened it back up on the following Monday in his own name.

"Over the years, we became even closer friends. And I always tried to express to him how grateful I was,

because he made it possible for me to go back to college, and he really changed my life. I think the world of him," Casson said. "He's a wonderful, wonderful person."

Gilmore recalls one story that he says best highlights Deuel's character. In the 1980's, there was a period of time when business was extremely slow, and the firm did not have enough consistent jobs in order to compensate employees with money generated by job contracts. Deuel then did a most unusual thing.

Instead of laying off any of the surveyors or field crews, Deuel initiated an extensive internally-funded project. He authorized the development and creation of concrete corner monuments for over 100 different sections of land.

"Fred Deuel ate that costs himself instead of laying off the crews. All that work was not charged to any client – all of the employees still had a 40-hour work week. He was always concerned about the people that were employed by him," Gilmore said.

"He's just a good guy. It may be the best compliment I could tell you. He's just a good guy."

### **A Sailor's Life**

When he wasn't on the job, Fred Deuel could be found somewhere by the coast, sailing or fishing.

"He was maybe 8 years old when he got his first sailboat, and he sailed it out on the bayou here in St. Pete. Always had boats, always on the water. And when we were kids, it was the same thing – we always had a boat, and we were always out on the water," Tracy said.

When Deuel decided to retire in 2006, Gilmore remembers speaking with him about the decision, and after seeing a smile on his face, he

always made sure he did it right."

Gilmore and Casson – who remain friends with Deuel to this day – also identify Deuel's management style as a reason for his success.

"He wasn't a forceful person. He was not the type of person that would create stress and try to get you to meet a demand or something of that nature," Casson said.

Deuel was also a considerate and understanding boss, who did not dismiss the input of his employees.

"There are some surveyors who won't listen to you. Fred was always one who might have an idea, might have a feeling for something, but he was always willing to listen to anyone else and listen to what their thoughts were," Gilmore said.

"As far as I'm concerned, that is a certain part of being a good surveyor."

Even as the founder of the company, Deuel was very involved in day-to-day operations, often personally overseeing jobs and joining the crew in the field.

"I felt and still feel that Fred was a

asked Deuel why he was smiling.

“Fred said ‘Well, you know, it was just too hard to survey and sail the boat. I could only choose one, so I chose sailing the boat!’” Gilmore recalled.

But Deuel’s passion for sailing goes beyond that of the average recreational boater. Rather, Deuel was every bit of a modern-day sailor, competing in various regattas, and serving as Commodore of the St. Petersburg Yacht Club in 2007. He owned a 31-foot Swedish sailboat named “Madonna”.

He competed an astounding 25 times in the Regata del Sol al Sol, an annual 456-mile race across the Gulf of Mexico that starts in St. Petersburg and ends at Isla Mujeres, an island off the coast of Cancun, Mexico.

He competed in the inaugural race in 1969, and just recently visited Isla Mujeres with Tracy to attend an event commemorating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the race

“He was there from the beginning when they started the regatta. They gave him a recognition plaque,” Tracy said.

“That’s another place you can mention Señor Deuel and they know who you’re talking about.”

### The Deuel Legacy

Deuel retired 12 years ago, after operating C. Fred Deuel & Associates for 52 years, from 1954 to 2006. Deuel & Associates still exists today with an office in Clearwater, under the management of Compass Engineering & Surveying.

The Deuel name looms large in St. Petersburg. That can be expected, as he played a role in developing several of the city’s landmarks over a span of six decades, including Eckerd College in the southwest corner of the city, and countless subdivisions.



*Lifelong friends Fred Deuel (right) and Harley Gilmore at the St. Petersburg Yacht Club.*

“People always see my last name and say, ‘What makes you a Deuel...any relation to Fred?’ And when I tell them he’s my dad, they say ‘Oh my god!’” Tracy exclaimed.

“He’s well known and well respected in the community. He always got along really well with everybody and they respected him.”

Deuel was married for 62 years to Mary Lou, of New York, after meeting her on a blind date on New Year’s Eve in 1952. She passed away in 2014.

Mary Lou was the head nurse in the ICU at Mound Park Hospital, which is now Bayfront Health St. Petersburg. She worked the night shift when her daughters were growing up, which figured well, because her husband’s job was by nature a daytime-only job.

“You know they say behind every good man, there is a good woman. They supported each other...she would come home and sleep until we got home from school,” Tracy said.

Walt Casson, Jr. and Harley Gilmore are still close friends with the man who helped their fledgling surveying careers nearly 65 years ago.

“Both Walt Jr. and myself have kept very close with Fred Deuel all the way through the years and consider him as one of the prominent surveyors that we’ve known,” Gilmore said.

“If he hadn’t been a good surveyor, I wouldn’t tell you that we’re still friends,” he added, laughing.

Casson still has the contract from when Deuel leased his father’s company. It dates August 30<sup>th</sup>, 1954.

“That’s how long he’s meant everything to me,” Casson said.

Now 91 years old, Deuel can no longer get on a sailboat. A few years back, he was undergoing physical therapy to try and do so, but unfortunately could not accomplish the feat.

But according to Tracy, it’s not too much of a problem.

“He lives on the water. He’s got a beautiful view,” she said.

“He loves to just sit out back and go down on the dock and look out at the water.”