



PUBLISHER AND COMMUNITY BOOSTER

MEET **THOMAS GAGNON**, FSHS CLASS OF 1964, CIVIC LEADER AND ENTREPRENEUR.

Thomas Gagnon

Upon completion of his two-year service in the United States Army during Vietnam and equipped with a business degree from the University of Minnesota, Thomas Gagnon faced a challenge and an opportunity. He intended to explore opportunities outside his home town when his father's failing health compelled him to confront his destiny and return to Faribault to take control of operations at the family-owned business, the *Faribault Daily News*.

As owner and publisher, Thomas Gagnon guided the *Faribault Daily News* to become one of the most respected community newspapers in the state. During his fifteen years as publisher, he faced many challenges. As one of only two independent daily newspapers in Minnesota, the *Faribault Daily News* lacked the benefit of large-chain financial efficiencies, according to Mike Cooper, former Managing Editor. Nevertheless, under Gagnon's prescient leadership, the newspaper invested in high-quality offset printing and computerized news and advertising equipment, thereby modernizing operations and enhancing productivity.

Gagnon realized investing in people created great opportunities. He supplied his employees with resources to accurately gather local news and develop local advertising. He communicated his values through allocation of resources. The *Faribault Daily News* devoted more column space to straight news and had a larger budget than most papers its size to hire news-gathering reporters. Gagnon paid his employees' membership in professional and community organizations. As a member of many organizations himself, he was always on the lookout for leads or information to give his reporters and advertising staff. While he was actively engaged in operations, he was not a micro-manager. Former employees described him as an "inspirational leader."

Gagnon's investment in people succeeded, as illustrated by awards from the Associated Press for news writing, photography, and advertising/design. In addition, several former employees advanced in their professions, such as Brian Peterson, Photography Editor for the *Minneapolis Star Tribune*. Many former

employees such as Jay Treadway, Jon Olson, and Pauline Schreiber remain active in the Faribault community.

Realizing that the print news business was in transformation, Gagnon sold the newspaper to a larger company in 1986. Faced with another challenge--how best to invest his expertise and time--he pursued a Master of Business Administration at the University of Minnesota's Carlson School of Management, a degree he completed in 1990.

The MBA launched an entrepreneurial period, during which he invested in job-producing businesses such as acquiring a stake in Blue Book Publications; investing in a new Faribault hotel property; and starting Bloom, a floral design and delivery business with his wife, Linda (which they sold to their employees/partners in 2004).

Gagnon served ten years on the District One Hospital Board where his leadership as Chair of the Governing Board guided the hospital through challenges resulting from consolidation and competition. He is a former member of the Faribault Rotary, the Faribault Congregational Church, and the Faribault United Way Board. He received the Gold Key Award for community service. As a Master Gardener, he brought pleasure to horticulture lovers through the Faribault Garden Tour.

Gagnon was a founding member of the Faribault Area Public School Educational Trust Association which raises funds to grant scholarships to graduating Faribault Public School seniors. Gagnon has fond memories of his public education. He was editor of the *Echo*, a high school publication, and Chair of the Board in Control of Student Publications at the University of Minnesota. He credits his *Echo* Supervisor for his love of journalism.

Dr. Richard Berge, nominator, says, "Tom demonstrated throughout his life and career, a commitment to excellence in all that he has undertaken and demonstrated, by example, service above self." Mike Cooper, nominator, concurs, "It's easy to say good things about Tom."