

LEONARDO DEL VECCHIO

BUSINESSMAN, 87

ITALIAN BILLIONAIRE SOLD LUXURY EYEWEAR



Unlike some of Italy's flashier industrialists, businessman Leonardo Del Vecchio kept a low profile, to the point that national media dubbed him 'Mr. Nobody.' ESSILOR/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

Fashion mogul had a rags-to-riches story, in which he started a small business and built it into a global operation producing thousands of frames a day

FRANCESCO D'EMILIO MILAN

Leonardo Del Vecchio, who founded eyewear empire Luxottica in a trailer and turned an everyday object into a global fashion item, becoming one of Italy's richest men in the process, died on Monday, the eyeglass company said. He was 87.

"EssilorLuxottica announces with deep sorrow the passing of Chairman Leonardo Del Vecchio," said a statement from the company, its name reflecting a deal forged several years ago between Luxottica and French-based lensmaker Essilor.

The statement said EssilorLuxottica's board would meet to "determine the next steps."

Luca Zaia, the Governor of Veneto, the northeast region where Mr. Del Vecchio started his business in 1961 in an Alpine valley town, hailed Mr. Del Vecchio as one of the "entrepreneurs of greatest success in all the world."

Italian media said Mr. Del Vecchio died in a Milan hospital, where he was admitted several weeks ago. No cause of death was cited.

From a start in a Milan orphanage, Mr. Del Vecchio went on to become one of Italy's richest industrialists. Globalizing fashion eyeglasses, Luxottica now makes frames for dozens of stellar fashion names, including Armani, Burberry and Chanel.

On Forbes's list of richest persons, Mr. Del Vecchio and his family was ranked last year at No. 60, with assets of US\$24.5-billion.

Mr. Del Vecchio's father sold vegetables on the streets of Milan but died before he was born. The youngest of four children, when he was in his 20s, he worked as an apprentice making parts for eyeglass frames, then went into business for himself. He moved from Milan to the Dolomite Mountains village of Agordo in 1961, taking advantage of an offer of free land to provide

jobs and discourage young people from flocking to cities for work.

What started as a company housed in a trailer steadily grew into a sprawling complex, a 90-minute drive from Venice, employing thousands of people and producing tens of thousands of frames every day.

Mr. Del Vecchio found gold by turning the rather mundane necessity of life into "designer frames" for prescription glasses and sunglasses. The Luxottica's corporate website lists 33 top brands, including Valentino, Prada, Michael Kors, Coach and Brooks Brothers.

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Two moves as he expanded his business were widely considered key. One strategy saw him invest in the retail sector, opening Luxottica stores. The other strategy led him to acquisitions, notably that of the U.S. company Ray-Ban, in 1999, a brand which under the company's marketing approach gained cachet.

Mr. Del Vecchio's empire expanded with a deal, announced in 2018, with France's Essilor. That accord created a massive entity with more than 140,000 employees in 150 countries.

But Mr. Del Vecchio took care to keep his family financial vehicle, the holding company Delfin. In its latest configuration, Mr. Del Vecchio held 25 per cent of its capital. Under Delfin's umbrella are considerable stakes in banking and insurance companies as well.

Unlike some of Italy's flashier industrialists, such as TV magnate Silvio

Berlusconi and Fiat's Gianni Agnelli, Mr. Del Vecchio kept a low profile, to the point that Italian media dubbed him "Mr. Nobody."

Corriere della Sera daily quoted him as saying of his early mentors in the trade: "They left me with several important lessons - discipline, method and competence."

Mr. Del Vecchio preached simplicity. "For years my lunch was based on boiled cabbage. Its smell reminds me of the great effort, the dream that I had to do something that was mine, even if small, but where I could put to use my ideas and my abilities," the Milan daily quoted him as saying.

He remained untouched by the corruption scandals that rocked Italian business and political power spheres in the early 1990s.

"I don't like paying taxes, but I like sleeping at night," Mr. Del Vecchio told Associated Press in an interview at company headquarters in 1995.

Premier Mario Draghi, an economist who had headed the European Central Bank, issued a tribute from Germany, where he was participating in the Group of Seven summit.

"For more than 60 years a protagonist of Italian entrepreneurship, Del Vecchio created one of the biggest companies of the country, starting out from humble origins," Mr. Draghi said in a written statement. The industrialist "brought the community of Agordo and the entire country to the centre of the world of innovation," the Italian premier said.

Mr. Del Vecchio married three times, including two times with his second wife, Nicoletta Zampillo. He had six children: son Claudio and two daughters from his first marriage to Luciana Nervo; a son, Leonardo Maria from his marriage to Zampillo; and two sons, Luca and Clemente, with Sabina Grossi, a former investor in the group, La Repubblica newspaper said.

ASSOCIATED PRESS

I REMEMBER

JOE SEGAL

Joe Segal is not only legendary in Canada, he's known as a hero in the Netherlands - specifically in Doetinchem, a small village he helped liberate on April 1, 1945.

To commemorate the 75th anniversary of the Dutch liberation in 2020, I organized In Our Fathers' Footsteps, in which 155 Canadian descendants of Second World War veterans would have walked in the footsteps of the Canadian troops in the Netherlands. However, the pandemic postponed the event which is now scheduled for September, 2022.

During the planning of a special commemoration in the village of Doetinchem, the Doetinchem Remembers Committee asked me to help them

locate a special soldier named Joe Segal. He belonged to the 2nd Canadian Division, 5th Brigade and was a member of the Calgary Highlanders. In 1944, his regiment had fought after D-Day in the Battle of the Scheldt, liberating Woensdrecht, then in the Battle of the Sloedam liberating Walcheren. In March, 1945, after fighting in the Battle of the Reichswald, the regiment had crossed the Dutch/German border and headed north to Doetinchem.

Iet (Hendrica) Gerritsen, a young woman in the Dutch resistance, lived in this village. Her diary describes April 1, 1945 - the day Doetinchem was liberated. When the villagers heard that the Canadians had finally arrived, everyone ran outside, welcoming them with

flags and food. Then, suddenly, German shelling erupted. Iet, her sister, Janny, and many residents fled to her home's basement together with some Canadian soldiers. As the building's foundation crumbled, a soldier (later identified as Joe Segal) used a mattress to protect them from the falling stones and glass. Joe is credited with having saved Iet's and Janny's lives. However, Joe's good buddy, Brownie (Walter Edward Brown) was among the 10 Canadians killed that day.

Iet's diary is in Doetinchem's museum and her daughter still lives in the village.

Karen Hunter, The Canadian Remembrance Torch

LIVES LIVED

FLORENCE ETHEL KENYON

Wife.  
Mother.  
Grandmother.  
Puppet maker.

Born April 30, 1922, in Calgary; died May 21, 2022, in Airdrie, Alta., of natural causes; aged 100.

The one thing you should know about Florence Ethel Kenyon, is that she was a woman who did not wish to be seen. In almost every photo she is raising her hand to block the camera from capturing her image.

In the photos she was unable to evade, you will see glimpses of the liveliness she tried to conceal - wild auburn curls tumbling down to frame a face of kind, bright eyes and a warm, open smile. (On many of these photos she expertly obscured her bosom with crafter's ribbon, believing her body was too shapely or her blouses too showy.)

Flo's comfort outside of the fray might have come as a result of being the last of four children, at least 15 years younger than her closest sibling and the only one born in Canada. She grew up on a sprawling corner lot on the western outskirts of Calgary. As a girl, she attended the two-room West Calgary School but since the nearest high school was too far away to reach by foot, her formal education simply ended at Grade 9.

During the war, Florence Knock worked at the Independent Biscuit Co. (her only paying job) and shortly after met George Kenyon, who was serving in the navy but was stationed in Calgary. Their large church wedding in 1946 was followed by a simple reception in her parents' backyard. Florence and George built a four-room shack right beside her childhood home. Their first son arrived a year later in 1947.

Like many women, there are two Florences to remember: first, the tough, discipline-dispensing matron of the Kenyon clan, attempting to keep gregarious George and her unruly sons, Alan and Gord, on short leashes: a constant battle for the straight and narrow. This Florence hung sheets on a frozen clothesline and heated rocks in the oven, stuffing them in her children's army cot beds to stave off the Calgary winter. (A family story also has Florence regularly thawing the frozen-solid goldfish bowl on the stove, the fish reanimating back to life by supper.)

And then there is the Flo who emerged once her boys were grown and gone. With successive arrivals of four perfect grandchildren, she warmed and softened like a thick pat of butter, offering them whatever they pointed to and dropping "no" from her vocabulary. She became the giver of Turkish Delight candy bars, endless back tickles and lulling bedtime stories that summoned and inspired the deepest of sleeps.

As Grandma, she was sage, magician, chef and camp counsellor. She could make puppets out of Big Mac containers and doll beds out of sponges and scrap fabric. She made the best Kraft Dinner, eschewing the recommended butter-to-milk ratio for a concoction far creamier and decadent.

Years later, when her first grandchild came out as gay, his parents thought maybe Flo had misunderstood, she was so nonchalant and accepting. They told her again the next morning, and she nodded and patted their hands, asked how they were doing with it - proving an open mind and an open heart are not limited by age or education.

In 2001, Florence became a widow, losing her George after 55 years of marriage. By then she had taken over the family purse strings from her ailing husband and eliminated their debt with her elementary school math and common sense. Her friends were the bank tellers, Safeway cashiers and bus drivers she saw daily. On his final day of work before retiring, the bus driver for her route asked if Florence would like to ride with him for the remainder of the day. She graciously accepted, and the two chatted for hours, as old friends do.

At the end, Florence left us in the gentle silence of night, her son and daughter-in-law by her side, her entire family's love wrapped snug against her. The perfect cocoon for whatever comes next.

David Kenyon is Florence's grandson.



Florence Ethel Kenyon.

To submit a Lives Lived: [lives@globeandmail.com](mailto:lives@globeandmail.com)

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