

# Neal R. Fosseen

## *Washington '39*

### Oxford Cup Roll No. 39

In Eastern Washington's largest city, the name *Neal R. Fosseen* invokes such glowing appellations as "the man who changed the face of Spokane" or "the man who helped save our city from economic collapse."

Even the local daily, *The Spokesman-Review*, saluted him with the headline, "Reluctant leader left his mark," noting: "As a mayoral candidate, Neal Fosseen initially was *reluctant*, and as mayor, he occasionally was frustrated, but as a former mayor, he's a standard-setter.

"The *mark* of the former public official, Marine Corps colonel and bank CEO is all over Spokane. There's the Fosseen Room on the campus of Mukogawa Fort Wright Institute. There's the Fosseen Award given each year to a military unit for community service. There's Camp Fosseen for Boy Scouts, named for a person who, at age 12, was the nation's youngest Eagle Scout."

It was 40 years ago that community leaders tapped Fosseen to reverse the flight of stores and jobs from downtown. Devoting seven years at 60-70 hours a week to his 'part-time' job as mayor, he declared, "The best way to bring jobs to Spokane is to have a well-run city." He introduced the council-city manager system, and soon he had elevated this "Capital of the Inland Empire" to a thriving center which led to the highly successful *Expo '74 World's Fair*.

Fosseen and his wife of almost 64 years, Helen Witherspoon, enjoy a full life that has included sharing their good fortune with a number of gift annuities to foundations, including one they recently established with the Beta Theta Pi Foundation to, as Fosseen sees it, "assist worthy young Betas fulfilling their educational and leadership goals. It's a win-win situation!"

After graduating from the UW in 1929, he was with Washington Brick, Lime & Sewer Pipe Co., 1923-58, the last 20 years as president; Securities Intermountain Co. as a director, 1954-71; Old National Bank of Washington, 1958-73, chairman and president 1972-73; and Washington Bancshares, 1968-73, chairman of the board and president 1972-73. He was a director of Utah-Idaho Sugar Co., First National Bank of Spokane, Spokane Industrial Park, North Coast Life Insurance Co., Old National Bancorp, Quarry Tile Co. and Day Mines, Inc.

He originated the sister city program and was personal ambassador to Nishinomiya, Japan, where he was named honorary citizen. His encouragement for development of the expanse of green along the Spokane River, that weaves through downtown, is in sharp contrast to the aging cityscape of the 1950s.

A lifetime volunteer in Beta Theta Pi, he still serves on the house corporation board for the chapter at Eastern Washington University in Cheney, 10 miles from Spokane. He and Helen have contributed many cultural artifacts to numerous institutions including a number of pre-Columbian Indian artifacts to the Otani Museum in Japan. They have two sons, Neal, Jr., and Roger.

*Erv Johnson, APR, Idaho '53, Editor, The Beta Theta Pi*