

John W. Chisholm



John W. Chisholm was born in Antigonish on January 5th, 1946. John co-founded with his father Nova Construction, one of the largest road building companies east of Quebec. When it came to the business of moving dirt and building roads, John was a natural from the start. The Chisholm clan, whose centuries-old motto was fierce with the fierce, was a family of farmers, loggers, and earthmovers. Mechanical competence was considered a necessity of life. So, at age 17, he bought his first D4 dozer and won a contract to dig the basement of the Angus L. MacDonald Library at St. Francis Xavier University. Later that year, John quit school for good and founded Nova Construction.

In 1975, at age 29, John and his team started construction on what is still considered to be among the largest and most successful industrial projects ever completed in Nova Scotia – the Wreck Cove Hydroelectric Plant. For the next three decades, John led Nova Construction's expansion into ever larger and more successful industrial projects: the development of Porcupine Quarry, considered to be among North America's finest sources of quality aggregate; the construction of the Cobequid Pass, and the establishment of Pioneer Coal, a reclamation mining company with operations throughout Cape Breton and Pictou County. He also played an instrumental role in the conception of the Confederation Bridge. His son Donald succeeded him as President of Nova Construction in 2006, but John remained active in the business until his death.

John played as hard as he worked. A lover of NASCAR racing, he traveled to Tennessee in the mid-1960s to scope out the legendary Bristol Motor Speedway, and created a replica, Riverside International Speedway, upon which his son Donald races today.

Quiet and old-fashioned, John believed that actions spoke louder than words. While he was well known for substantial gifts made to a number of organizations including the IWK Children's Hospital and the Coady International Institute at Saint Francis Xavier University, many people around Antigonish were touched by his everyday kindness and generosity. In 2011, he was recognized for his significant contributions to Nova Scotia's economy with an honorary degree from St. FX, and in 2013 he received an honorary degree from Dalhousie University. And so, 48 years after dropping out of high school, he finally graduated. What an awful pile of dirt it took to make that happen.

John was always incredibly grateful to the many loyal and committed employees of Nova Construction, past and present, who contributed to the success of the Nova group of companies.