



John D. O'Brien  
"... The Inland spirit is not a myth."

GENERAL MANAGER, 1942-1961

## J. D. O'Brien, Inland Pioneer, Dies at 72

A final chapter to an era when strong personalities molded events was written on May 9 with the death of John D. O'Brien, 72, an Inland pioneer and the division's second general manager.

Mr. O'Brien's General Motors career spanned 42 years and when it closed with his retirement in 1961, his never-ceasing zeal and dedication spilled over into community affairs and civic service.

He provided leadership for the Human Relations Commission, the Home Rule Charter Council, and the United Negro College Fund Drive, to mention but a few, and his civic accomplishments were recognized and honored.

His philanthropic and charitable acts were performed in silence and with a decorum befitting a humanitarian.

The effects of Mr. O'Brien's Inland leadership endure to this very day. The production of weather-

strips, a project brought to fruition by his tireless efforts, remains as his monument here. The World War II manufacture of carbines—a program he lead from the improbable to a historic multi-million reality—was felt in every corner of the Free World.

Mr. O'Brien was among Inland's founders, coming here as purchasing agent from the Dayton Wright Company in November, 1922. Dayton Wright was the springboard from which Inland grew, and men like J. D. O'Brien, who became general manager in 1942, provided the impetus for that growth.

He was the embodiment of Inland in his time. His own words, printed in past issues of *The Inlander*, best express his beliefs and his dreams:

"To me and to a great many others, Inland has been more than a place to work. It has been a place of opportunity . . . The spirit throughout Inland has always been one of cooperation . . . The Inland spirit is not a myth. There is an Inland spirit . . .

"A company's reputation is nothing but the reflection of all those

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December 20, 1943, marked a high point in the career of the late General Manager J. D. O'Brien and for the men and women of Inland whom he inspired: the presentation of the 1,000,000th Carbine to Brigadier General James Kirk for permanent display in the U.S. Ordnance Department's historical museum.

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who represent the company in any capacity . . . Inland is proud of the reputation it has . . .

"We are all responsible for what success Inland has had, and as long as we work together as a team, we will continue to succeed if we recognize that, with all of our technical know-how, success still depends upon how hard we as individuals are willing to work, how well we apply ourselves, the sacrifices we are willing to make to succeed and to help our company succeed."

J. D. O'Brien's particular strength was his effect on and his motivation of people.

General Manager T. O. Mathues emphasized this point in his reflections:

"Mr. O'Brien took a very strong hand in shaping my future. I have always considered his tremendous determination his greatest asset. He set a pace second to none in welding together an organization to get the job done.

"I particularly recall the early

days of our foam rubber door strip job. We supplied 100 per cent of the corporation's needs. We HAD to succeed and no one knew this better than J.D.

"He worked 18 hours a day, seven days a week. You could find him on the strip job at 11 o'clock at night and he was back there at 4 o'clock the next morning. Just the mere fact of his presence at all hours of the day said more than anything else that the organization had to give everything it had to get the job done. He set the example!

"When people get older," Mr. Mathues continued, "they tend to look back. Not so with Mr. O'Brien. He was always forward looking. His ideas were always youthful, flexible and adaptable. He believed in the capacity of youth to get things done and he was willing to trust young people with some pretty big jobs. He was never interested in a person's age, only in his ability to do a job.

"Mr. O'Brien had a strong sense

of moral and religious values," Mr. Mathues concluded, "and these he impressed on everyone. He was a man with a dream, a man with an abounding interest in everything and in everyone."

Works Manager C. K. Haas concurs with this:

"I don't know of any other man who enjoyed helping other people better themselves more than he did. He always was giving opportunities to others. He was a sensitive man with a vigorous approach and a rare sense of humor. When he wanted something done, he wanted it done today.

"He was a man who made things go," Mr. Haas continued. "When a lot of us were ready to throw in the sponge on the foam strip job, it was he who always came up with another idea. His mind was always on Inland, even during an occasional golf game. You could almost count on a conference somewhere on the green if he'd meet you there."

Equally strong are the impres-

sions of Herman J. Raiff, retired production manager:

"Mr. O'Brien was both my employer and my friend. His dedication to his responsibilities and to Inland's customers dictated my path. His intense desire was sure to rub off on people who worked for him. He was a man's man. He worked hard and expected others to do the same. His word was his bond; fairness guided his decisions. My association with him will always be the major event in my working life."

Matthias A. Lause, retired Inland sales manager, recalls a 45-year association:

"There is little anyone can add to what has already been said about his ability and his devotion in many fields. My friendship and fellowship with him date back to our Dayton Wright days. I have a deep appreciation for having had the opportunity of working with him and for him and for being numbered among his friends."