

# DELLEN AND ANKMAR FOUNDERS DIE AT 88

## The end of an era: Remembering Gene Renner and Bob Martinez

*Editor's note: This summer, the garage door industry lost two of its oldest pioneers and entrepreneurs: Gene Renner, Delden's founder, and Bob Martinez, Ankmar's founder.*

*While they weren't directly connected, these two had much in common.*

*They both served in the military in the 1940s and then attended college. They both started in the garage door industry as door dealers in 1956 and later became prominent manufacturers.*

*Both served in leadership roles with an industry association. They were two of the three partners in the Garage Door Group, a unique venture that was formed in 1982. And finally, both died in 2016 at the age of 88, within six weeks of each other.*

*Here are their stories.*

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## Gene Renner, founder of Delden Mfg.

**A** native of De Soto, Kan., Elmer “Gene” Renner served in the U.S. Navy and then attended Baker University. He soon earned a reputation as a gifted salesperson for lumber companies, and in 1956 he joined his father, Elmer, to sell overhead doors as R&R Garage Door in the Kansas City area. In 1957, Renner changed the company name to Renner Supply, selling builders’ hardware and garage doors, installing Ro-Way and Wagner doors.

In 1964 Renner purchased a Lincoln door clamp from Berry Door in Birmingham, Mich., and created Delden Manufacturing with Dick Wright, Harry Link, and Elmer Renner as minority partners. (Delden was named for Dee Layne, Dennis, and Denise, his three children.) With the clamp, Delden could make an 8x7 wood garage door for less than \$30.

Two years later, Renner and Dick Wright formed Renner-Wright Corporation in St. Louis, again making garage doors with a Lincoln door clamp, and the company soon became part of Delden. In 1969 Delden began producing fiberglass and aluminum garage doors.

Then came the steel door era. Delden acquired a rollformer in 1980 and began producing its own commercial steel sectional garage doors. That same year, Renner was elected president of the National Association of Garage Door Manufacturers (NAGDM).

In 1982 he became a co-founder of the Garage Door Group (GDG), formed with

Amarr and Ankmar to make residential steel raised-panel garage doors. The site chosen for the GDG plant was in Kansas City, home to Delden. That same year, GDG bought Roll-Easy Springs of Kansas City.

By 1998 Amarr had purchased Ankmar’s and Delden’s shares in GDG. But Delden continued to grow and built an 84,000-sq.-ft. plant in Kansas City in 2000.

Gene Renner finally retired in 2003 at age 75, naming his daughter, Denise Dahms, as president of Delden. The company now has showrooms in Kansas City; St. Louis; Springfield and Camdenton, Mo.; Wichita, Kan.; and Des Moines, Iowa. He remained a strong voice in the company until he died of ischemic cardiomyopathy on May 7, 2016, at the age of 88.

### Remembering Gene

“I started as a salesman with Gene,” said Rick Vinson, who later partnered with Renner as co-owner of Delden of Iowa. “You never had to sign an agreement or contract or anything like that ... just a handshake. Gene was just solid as a rock. I can’t say enough good about the guy.”

Ken Roehl, vice president of sales at LiftMaster, remembered working with Renner at the beginning of his own career. “He was just a gentle person to a young up-and-coming salesperson 25 years ago,” said Roehl. “A loving husband, father, and

leader. That was always a very strong point he impressed on me as a young man.”

Renner took time to get to know his employees. Jerry Sullivan, a 31-year Delden employee, said, “He knew my wife’s name and my children’s names. I was one of 70, yet he knew that about me.”

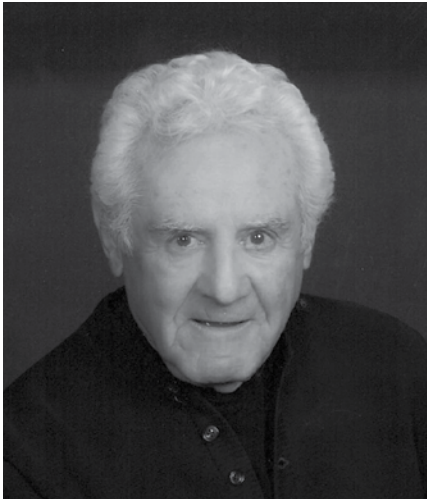
“Gene Renner was a prince of a man,” said Richard Brenner, now vice chairman of Entrematic (Amarr). “He was kind, smart, and a great businessman. He always worked to develop common-sense solutions. Our partnership with Gene, his family, and Delden was a key part of our success.”

Jeff Mick, president and CEO of Entrematic, recalls meeting Gene and signing several contracts with him. “It really touched my heart when he said, ‘Yeah, we signed those contracts. I don’t know why we couldn’t have just shaken hands.’” said Mick.

“The biggest thing he taught me was not to worry about the past,” said his daughter, Denise. “The past is the past. Move forward with your plan. You just keep your eyes forward instead of always looking back.”

Two of his children, Dee Layne and Dennis, preceded him in death. D+AS sends its condolences to Freida, his wife of 68 years, his daughter, Denise, and his extended family.

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## Bob Martinez, founder of Ankmar

**A**fter high school, Robert A. “Bob” Martinez served in the U.S. Army and then attended the University of Denver. In 1956 at the age of 28, he began Ankmar Garage Door, an installing garage door company in Denver, Colo., using a \$500 loan to buy his first pickup truck. The name was a combination of Martinez’s last name and that of Rudy Ankley, an original partner who was involved for a short time.

With his sights set on making a larger impact in the industry, Martinez served on the board of directors of the Door and Operator Dealers Association (DODA) from 1968 to 1971 and again from 1974 to 1976, serving as vice president in 1975-76. He was also involved in the Far Western Garage Door Association (FWGDA).

### Becoming a manufacturer

Ankmar entered the world of manufacturing in 1974, making wood garage doors. In 1976 Martinez and John Jellá started American Garage Door of Colorado to provide installations for Ankmar, eventually employing 24 installers.

In 1978 and 1979 Martinez and Jellá developed, patented, and started producing the successful R-2000 Cladwood panel door with a steel meeting rail, using panels produced in Sweet Home, Ore. Martinez later created Bomar Industries to license and sell the product.

In 1982, when steel raised-panel doors started gaining popularity, he joined with Herb Brenner of Amarr and Gene Renner of Delden to form the Garage Door Group, a unique partnership arrangement to manufacture these sections in Kansas City. Ankmar stayed with the group until 1990 and then started its own steel-door plant in Kansas City in 1991.

### Success as a dealer

Ankmar’s installation business expanded in 1996 with the opening of a new location in Colorado Springs. That same year, Ankmar began manufacturing high-end custom wood-sided doors in Colorado. In 2003 Ankmar opened a new retail/wholesale location in Loveland, Colo.

As an active door dealer and manufacturer, Martinez often sold sections only, allowing dealers to add their own hardware. This made Ankmar “extremely competitive with the major door manufacturers who sold their product in a complete package,” said John Jellá. “Both dealers and manufacturers were well aware of Bob Martinez and Ankmar Door.”

### Rounding out his career

In 2002, seeing the potential of the Cladwood product as a carriage-style garage door, Ankmar purchased the Cladwood manufacturing facility in Sweet Home, Ore., changing that product’s name to CladPanel and the company name to Linmar Industries.

In 2005, after owning Ankmar for nearly a half century, Martinez sold the company to Gallagher Industries, a private equity group in Denver, Colo. In 2008, Overhead Door bought Ankmar’s CladPanel operations in Sweet Home, while DH Pace purchased the Ankmar brand and its Colorado assets.

On June 19, 2016, Bob Martinez died at the age of 88. He had Alzheimer’s disease.

### Others remember

“I think his ability to read the market was key to his success,” said Linda, his wife of 41 years. “When the residential market was down, he concentrated on the commercial market. At one time, his wholesale operations kept business alive.”

On a personal level, Bob Martinez could rub people the wrong way. “I have no fond memories of Bob Martinez,” said Richard Brenner, former Amarr CEO. “While his customers seemed to like him, Bob was polarizing. One of the driving forces in my life was when Bob told me at an Expo that I’d never be a door guy.”

“Bob wasn’t always liked, but he was always respected,” added Linda. “Bob always protected the tail-gater. After all, he once was one.”

### A tough competitor

To John Jellá, president of First United Door Technologies, Bob Martinez was the father of a friend, then Jellá’s boss, then a business partner, and finally, a competitor.

“He was well known for being a tough competitor,” said Jellá. “Bob was intense; he was not afraid to confront any situation, no matter who or what it was about. He was a very tough negotiator. You wanted to be at the top of your game when dealing with Bob.”

In contrast to his toughness, Bob Martinez was also known for helping people. “He was proud to be able to send many grandchildren and young adults through college,” said his obituary.

“He did so much for so many people, and he never patted himself on the back for it,” added Jellá. “He wasn’t afraid to share his knowledge and help people grow their business. He was a good man; the industry will miss him.”

His sons Kevin and Colin preceded him in death. D+AS sends its condolences to his wife, Linda, his two surviving sons, Ron and Christopher, and his extended family. ■