



Inducted: 2010

John Strybosch, a native of Holland, moved to the Strathroy area in 1951 where he succeeded in establishing a farm with his two brothers and one sister. A respected volunteer advisor to the many Dutch immigrants who also established successful farms in Ontario, he focused on farm finance and the record keeping aspects of farm management. John's appreciation for the value of a locally owned and managed financial institution led him to being instrumental in establishing the St. Willibrord Credit Union which later became the Libro Financial Group. Over the years he has served as both a director and a manager. A man of integrity, John has earned the respect and loyalty of staff and members alike.

**JOHN STRYBOSCH
1923-**

John Strybosch was born March 3, 1923 on the twenty acre family farm in the Brabant area of the Netherlands. He attended the local elementary school for grades one through seven followed by two years of secondary school at a seminary. At 15 he started fulltime work on the home farm. The following year he started a four year agricultural course provided by evening classes two nights a week with emphasis on bookkeeping and farm business management. This course was completed despite problems of war and the occupation by enemy forces.

After the Second World War people in the Netherlands were faced with enormous challenges. The postwar era offered few opportunities to a new generation. Many of the industries and much of the infrastructure had been destroyed, housing was in short supply, jobs were scarce and many feared that the farmland which had supported their families for generations would not sustain a growing population.

At the same time, the war had left countries such as Canada with a shortage of labour and expanding economies. Immigration was encouraged by government policy. Notices went out to many war ravished European countries. Canada offered promises of cheap land and good wages and would welcome those willing to work.

509,000 Dutch immigrants arrived in Canada between 1946 and 1978. About 20,000 came each year from 1951 to 1963. Most settled in Ontario.

John's parents, through hard work and determination, had established a 20 acre farm. They had a family of eight children – John being the oldest – they had struggled and endured through several years of occupation

during the Second World War. Within two years of the end of the war, however, both parents had died leaving John as the oldest to hold the family together and to assist each sibling to move forward into life.

Their farm was near a small town that had been quite ravished by the War. There was a lot of turmoil and uprooting as people tried to get used to the postwar world and some had lost everything. For the next three years, with twenty three year old John as head of the family of eight, they operated the home farm but made no financial progress.

During these years John was very involved with the local co-operative bank and thus was aware of the financial situation of many farmers. He also increasingly became aware of the troubles and successes fellow Dutch farmers were having when they moved to Canada. He wrestled with the thought of immigrating to Canada in hopes that this new land would provide the opportunity for a more satisfying life for him and the others in the family. After weighing the pros and cons, and much mental anguish, the decision was made and their new life began in Strathroy in July of 1951. Two years later he returned to Holland to marry his wife Helena (Lena). In 1956, John and Lena along with his brothers Bill and Tony and sister, Ricky purchased a farm north of Strathroy. Over time this would become Tony's farm.

Before leaving Holland, from 1949 until 1951, John was very closely associated with the "farmers lending bank" co-operative. He appreciated the enormous value such a locally owned and managed financial institution could be to farmers. It was not surprising then that upon his arrival in Canada he immediately became interested in the "Dutch Catholic Immigrants Credit Union".

Father Jan Van Wezel had initiated the credit union in the Roman Catholic Diocese of London. The Certificate of Incorporation was received January 25, 1951 to serve the 9 county areas from Windsor to Woodstock. John quickly became a member (number 28 on the registry). He envisioned what it could become and the breadth of services it could provide over time. Because of his education, training and work experience in Holland, he was a natural to provide leadership to this fledgling organization. He was promptly appointed to the Board of Directors and was soon acting as a fieldsman, loan counselor and receiver of deposits. He was in fact "Mr. Credit Union" among the new Dutch Catholic Canadians of the area. He served on the credit union advisory committee and acted as "cashier" for the Strathroy district.

When in 1964, John and Lena moved to Arkona, he helped to establish a new branch at that location. As secretary-cashier in the Arkona division he was also responsible for activities in the area around Thedford, Grand Bend, Strathroy, Watford, Watford, Wyoming, Forest and Parkhill. John helped many new immigrants to arrange their finances, obtain loans from the Credit Union and make their deposits with the Credit Union. He also gave advice on farming practices that were appropriate for their new land and generally was a tremendous help to the beginning farmers. He even established a bookkeeping business to aid the new folks in coping with their new environment.

When the general manager resigned in 1968, board members called on John to take on that role. His decision to accept was not an easy one to make. He was aware of the changes that were needed to enable the Credit Union to grow and evolve into the full fledged financial services enterprise that he envisioned that it should become. John Strybosch accepted the challenge presented to him and over the next twenty years in the position of General Manager over saw many changes and the strengthening position of his Credit Union.

Some of the more significant changes John was instrumental in achieving included changes to the Charter and constitution to broaden the client base, to change the name to St. Willibrord Community Credit Union and to enhance the morale and vision of service of employees. A plan of growth was put in place that encouraged the establishment of branch offices and the provision of a broad array of financial services. Loan limits were increased in keeping with the times. Growth by amalgamations with other credit unions became an acceptable strategy but there was no compromising on the principals of service, trust, integrity and treatment of members as individual persons and owners.

The slow economy and skyrocketing interest rates of the early 80's were a severe challenge to the Credit Union. A series of 23 monthly losses , was experienced and it took 4 years to make back those losses , but the Credit Union had preserved and treated all borrowers and depositors fairly and the essential element of trust was maintained. By 1988 when John Strybosch retired, through his ongoing efforts and dedication to the credit union concept, he had earned the respect and loyalty of staff and members by setting clear policies and establishing long term achievable goals for the organization. This foundation enabled "Libro" (the new name) to grow into one of the leading financial institutions for the agricultural community of south western Ontario. As of Sept. 2009 Libro has 51,800 owners served through 15 branches, a call centre and online services.

John Strybosch made a leap of faith when he shepherded his brothers and sisters to what he hoped would be a brighter future in Canada. Little did he know how much brighter he would make the lives of thousands of patrons through his integrity, boundless enthusiasm and vision for the Credit Union. From 1951 until 1988 John was the backbone of one of the few financial institutions willing to lend funds to new immigrants on favourable terms. Today his credit union, "Libro ", provides full financial services for all.