Gianni Radici – a man who never forgot his roots

Gianni Radici, the founder of the Italian RadiciGroup, who died on October 5 at the age of 81, was renowned both for his exceptional business acumen and for his huge commitment to the local community – the Gandino and Seriana valleys in the northern Italian province of Bergamo – and to the needy in general.

He was born and died in his native town of Leffe in Val Gandino, yet his prolific career saw him transform a modest family business into a vast industrial group covering three continents and an impressive array of sectors of business and industry.

Gianni Radici's father, Pietro, produced blankets and carpets, which he then transported by horse and carriage to sell in Italy and throughout Europe. But it was 22-year-old Gianni who officially founded the first family company – Tessitura Pietro Radici – in his father's name in 1946. From those early post-war years he then led the business on its steady ascent.

The 1950s saw the company grow laterally, with production extending from blankets and carpets to include car rugs and fabrics. Between the 1960s and 70s growth became vertical, with the establishment of RadiciFil in 1964 to produce polymers and synthetic fibres. In the same period the company – already on the way to becoming a group – diversified into chemicals and into loom production, laying the foundations of what was to become one of the leading textile machinery groups in the world, Itema, still owned by the Radici family. During the same decade, the group began in this same decade to spread its European wings, with Ralux producing printed carpets in Belgium, Noyfil manufacturing polyester yarns and microfibres in Switzerland and Deufil in Germany producing polypropylene yarns for carpets. By the 1980s the group had clearly imposed its presence as one of the major European producers with the establishment of Radici Novacips for the production of nylon 6 and 6.6 polymers in 1981, followed in 1986 by Radici Chimica SpA, where the group developed new production techniques for polyamide 6.6 polymers, to supply its own yarn and fabric production facilities.



Gianni Radici presided over the exceptional growth of the RadiciGroup during his long career.

RadiciGroup

While RadiciGroup's fibre activities continued to expand, with a whole string of new acquisitions in Italy, its other areas of activity also grew at home and abroad, with RadiciPlastics in France, RadiciSoltex in the USA for non-wovens and Fortrose in Hong Kong. The list of new activities through the 1980s and 90s included the production of turnkey textile and chemical plants all over the world, plastics, hydroelectric energy and real estate.

Today, the group's fibre division has a turnover of €588 million followed by Chemicals at €286 million, Textiles at 140 million, Plastics at €116 million and Auxiliary (energy and real estate) at €65 million, all contributing to global consolidated turnover of €1,068 million in 2004, up from €971 million in 2003. Its 49 production units are located in a total of 15 countries, China included.

Angelo Radici has de facto been at the helm of the group since 1994, when his father had the first illness that forced him to withdraw from active involvement and take the position of honorary president. He is seconded by brothers Maurizio (deputy president of the group, and CEO of the Textiles Division) and Paolo. The other members of the management operating committee are Alessandro Manzoni, Luigi Gerolla, Cleanto Giusto and Paolo Antonietti. The latter is also CEO of the Fibres Division, which is sub-divided into Industrial, Fashion&Interiors, PET Yarns, Flooring and Acrylic.

They have inherited a sizeable buiness, since even in 2003 the RadiciGroup was slated as having 25% of the European market share in synthetic fibres, 15% in plastic, and 13% in chemicals and nylon.

In 1985 Gianni Radici received a gold award from the Belluno District made to personalities of sport, showbusiness, culture, industry and science who, in spite of the greatness of their own achievements, had remained modest and unassuming individuals. The award was made to Gianni Radici for the energy and far-sightedness with which he developed industrial activity in his beloved Valseriana region of Italy and subsequently in Belgium, Germany and Switzerland. In 1990 he was awarded the Cavalierato al merito del lavoro (Order of Merit) and in 2000 he was made an honorary Commander of the Order of the Crown of Belgium, commemorating the RadiciGroup's 28 years in Belgium. He was a board member of the Italian textile federation, of various banks and of a local publishing company. He was honorary chairman of the local ski club, the AlbinoLeffe football club and of the Bergamo section of the Italian Red Cross. Together with his wife, Signora Luciana Previtali Radici, he was involved in the management of a retirement home for the needy in his home town and in the works of the Fondazione Luciana e Gianni Radici in Romania. He financed numerous local initiatives including the rehabilitation of local valleys after landslide damage and the building of sports facilities for the local commuity.

Gianni Radici preferred cross-country skiing, mountain walking and listening to music to worldly social events. Of the thousands who attended his funeral, many had personal reasons to regret the passing of this discreet, local and international figure.

"I only need money" – Gianni Radici once said – "in order to procure work for people." With 5,600 employees world wide he achieved that goal better than most.