

## Community Comment 2/4/2013 – Immigration

By Jon Sapper

This is Jon Sapper for Community Comment.

Immigration seems to be on the minds of politicians these days. We are a nation of immigrants, except for Native Americans and their wonderfully rich cultures. Immigrants come from around the world to form a melting pot of cultures united in opportunity for a better life. Not a guarantee, just an opportunity.

I was reading some papers the other day about two immigrants who came to America in the early 1900's. Their names were Jean and Charles Avnet, brother and sister. Jean came here first, leaving her family at the age of 15. Growing up near the Russian/Polish border, she heard that America was the land of opportunity and said, "That's where I have to go." Even though she didn't speak any English and only completed 6<sup>th</sup> grade, Jean got on a boat by herself and came to this country, landing on Ellis Island. She married, raised two children, worked many jobs to support them and as she said, "I have lived the American dream". She could also speak, read and write five languages: German, Russian, Hebrew, English and Spanish. Not bad for a 6<sup>th</sup> grade education.

Her brother, Charles, arrived in America a few years later. He believed in the American spirit and hard work. The other day I was reading about the company he founded in 1921; Avnet. It was an electronics company and his first year sales were \$85,000. He believed that businesses should operate by core values. His company's values were integrity (which meant honesty, respect for others and trustworthiness), customer service, accountability, teamwork and innovation.

Those core values combined with hard work and a code of conduct of the highest ethical standards in all business practices, that all employees must adhere to, have grown Avnet into one of the world's largest distributors of electronic parts, with over 17,000 employees in 80 countries and over \$13 billion in annual sales. Avnet is ranked in the top 100 of Fortune 500 companies and for the 4<sup>th</sup> year in a

row, is number one in their industry in Fortune magazine's list of most admired companies.

The character traits of Jean and Charles Avnet and others who came around that same time are rooted in hard work, resiliency, integrity, respect for others, self-reliance and the belief in this country. They helped make America what it is and I trust our newest immigrants will embrace these same values and entrepreneurial spirit.

I do believe America's best days can be in front of us, but I have to admit, I am humbled when I read the accounts of immigrants like Jean and Charles Avnet, my grandmother and her brother. I have a long way to go.

This has been Jon Sapper for Community Comment.