

# THE LEGACY REMAINS AS HARDIMANS AND REDWOOD PART

by Maxime Kawawa-Beaudan

Some days, they're everywhere: black hoodies dotting the halls, worn by seniors, juniors and sophomores alike. In orange text, they read, "Trenchless Titan." They serve as advertisements for the company by the same name, and the Redwood family that founded it, the Hardimans.

Most students at Redwood know the name Hardiman; after all, the school and the family are inextricably intertwined. Six Hardiman children—Sean, Kevin, Brendan, Eilish, Liam and Declan—have come to Redwood. Their mother, Melissa, attended in the '80s. But the Hardiman story (the Irish half of it, at least) started far from Larkspur, in the bogs of County Galway, Ireland. There, in a little town called Attymon, Gerry Hardiman worked alongside his father, who maintained the machines used by a government-owned company, Bord na Móna, to dig up a heating fuel called peat.

From a young age, Gerry worked amid the enormous engines of his father's trade: the baggers, bulldozers and turf-cutters. He drove locomotives, cleaned drains and moved railroad tracks. In his free time, he played a game called hurling, the national sport of Ireland. He played well—so well, in fact, that he was recruited by a hurling team in America, the San Francisco Gaels. He arrived in San Francisco in 1986, a young immigrant with nothing but an invitation from a regional sports club.

Later that year, he met Melissa Ross, a California girl who'd lived in Larkspur all her life. After finishing the sports career that had brought him to the United States, Gerry worked for a contractor who installed large sewer pipes, storm drains and water lines for municipalities. It was similar to some of the work he'd been doing in Ireland as a teenager, and in 1988, Gerry got his own contractor's license and set up his own company. That same year, Melissa and Gerry married.

Since then, the Hardimans have built their enterprise and a family of six children. They've juggled two sets of roles: parents and business owners. The outside of the Hardiman house speaks volumes about this balancing act, and how the two spheres overlap.

Parked on the curb outside of the suburban Larkspur home are three heavy-duty pickup trucks. In the backyard, power tools lie where a play structure once stood. The backyard separates the main house from a stand-alone, one-room office where Melissa and Gerry base their operations.

When the company began, in the late '80s, the back office housed just two desks: one for Gerry, one for Melissa. They worked on huge, multi-million dollar projects, mainly on public works for cities that took them everywhere from Santa Cruz to Sacramento. The work site was miles away, and the kids had their playground.

"Our backyard was very self-sufficient. In the olden days it didn't look like a work yard. This was the neighborhood house. The kids would come here and play. They would crawl all over, and I had toys and Johnny Jump Ups," Melissa said.

While the formative years of the company left the house largely free of clutter, the job left little time for leisure. The Hardimans were working long hours, day after day, all the while balancing their multitude of roles: crew chief, boss, husband, wife, father, mother.

"I worked between the hours of nine and two, and when the kids were off of school I was their mom, and



Photo by Maxime Kawawa-Beaudan

**LEADING A TEAM of workers on the job site, crew chief Sean Hardiman pauses to take a break**

they went to bed at eight and I came out here and we'd work," Melissa said.

All that work paid off. Hardiman Construction started growing. The company fixed pipelines, built foundations, erected houses, shored up retaining walls and put in storm drains. And one day, the Hardimans decided enough was enough.

"We were working too hard. We needed to take our kids to soccer practice, to soccer games," Melissa said.

They shifted their focus to more local jobs, so that Melissa and Gerry could stay closer to home. They became more of a self-described 'mom-and-pop shop.' By this time, the kids had grown. The eldest Hardiman son, Sean, had just graduated from high school. Sean joined



Photo by Maxime Kawawa-Beaudan

**CRACKING OPEN THE road with the excavator, Brendan (left) and Gerry (right) discuss how best to execute the maneuver.**

the construction team, and was soon running a crew of his own. In a natural progression, family and company became further intertwined.

Of course, everyone in the Hardiman household had been involved with the tools of construction long before this. All of the boys had learned to drive the machines and operate power tools. They learned to use backhoes and run excavators, tow trailers and drive trucks.

"I was just running with the crew. Sometimes I'd have to go out and cut open the road so we could actually dig down to the pipe. Other times, we'd come through after and pull the pipe through," senior Declan said.

Soon enough, many of them were signing on for real.

Kevin, the second-oldest son, graduated from school at the University of California, Los Angeles in 2015. Melissa and Gerry were overwhelmed with smaller, local jobs, and the paperwork that came with them. Kevin came in to help with bookkeeping and payroll.

Brendan graduated from Redwood and took up a leadership position as a crew chief. Eilish returned from Cuesta College in San Luis Obispo and took a desk in the office, helping with the accounts receivable and accounts payable. Liam worked during the summers.

Over time, the Hardimans built a community of workers extending into Redwood itself. Many of their children's friends eventually found a place in the company. Declan and his friends Nick Calzaretta, Jackson Holscher and Wiley Geiger, current Redwood students, signed up to work during the summer.

Today, around the Redwood campus, this connection with the company and the family appears in the Trenchless Titan hoodies, which friends of the Hardimans, along with students who have worked on their sites, sport in the halls.

Trenchless Titan, Hardiman Construction's sewer repair company, started in 2009, under the guidance of Sean and Gerry. While the Hardimans didn't develop the trenchless method of sewer line replacement, they were the first in Marin to adopt the new method. Normally, installation involves digging a trench from the house to the street. The trenchless method uses specialized tools to pull a new pipe through the old

pipe, pushing the old out of the way.

Sewer line replacements occur more frequently in Marin than one might imagine. Recently, the local sanitary district passed a new mandate requiring people selling, remodeling or buying a house to inspect their sewer lateral. The mandate has brought a great deal of business to the Hardimans from Marin.

"Most of the sewer lines around here are about a hundred years old, or fifty or sixty. They're often defective or in bad condition," Gerry said.

If the pipes fail a pressure test, they have to be replaced.

"It's not like a new beautiful backyard or patio. It's not aesthetically lovely. Twenty bucks says most people don't even know that they have a sewer pipe," Melissa said.

In this way, much of the work the Hardimans do goes unnoticed.

When they do their job well, no beautiful verandas or glossy wood floorboards are left in their wake. They're the behind the scenes players of the construction world—as invisible as they are integral.

As the company and the children have grown, they've left an indelible mark on the community around them. And even as the last child, Declan, graduates this year, the family name won't fade from these halls. After all, the Hardiman house and office lie a mere five-minute drive away from where mother and children went to high school.

The Hardimans are just around the corner.

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*Life is a journey, not a destination. —Ralph Waldo Emerson*