

1945 November 9-15

When Buying a Car Made News



—Tribune Photo
A 1946 Model Ford Super DeLuxe Tudor Sedan was purchased last week by Dr. Thoralf Gundersen, right. The sale was made by Kenny Dahl, left, manager of Dahl Motors Co., and Buck Wittenberg, assistant manager, center. Gundersen was recently discharged after 21 months in the European theater of operations.

(*La Crosse Tribune*, 1945 November 11, page 2)

It may seem slightly absurd that the sale of an automobile would rate a photograph and an article in the local newspaper, but this has to be considered in the context of November 1945.

In January 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt appointed [Donald M. Nelson](#) as head of the [War Production Board](#). Nelson was given sweeping powers to marshal American industry into the production of the equipment and supplies needed to win a war. One of his first edicts was to prohibit the manufacture of new automobiles and other nonessential goods. The assembly lines of the automobile industry would instead manufacture Jeeps, trucks, tanks and other tracked vehicles, aircraft and aircraft

parts, and guns. The automobile industry produced 2.4 million trucks alone, and a total of \$29 billion worth of war material.¹

With the war at an end, the production of automobiles resumed. For a public tired of making do with what they had for the past four-plus years and many flush with cash from the wartime economy, the demand for all consumer goods was great.

[Henry Ford II](#) jumped ahead of the other automakers by starting production of 1946 model cars on July 3, 1945. The 1946 models were essentially 1942 designs. Ford Motor Company manufactured 34,440 cars in 1945. The first 1946 Ford Super DeLuxe Tudor that came off the assembly line went to President [Harry S. Truman](#).²



1946 Ford Super Deluxe Tudor Sedan

[\(Classic.com\)](#)

Dr. Thorolf Gundersen bought the first one in La Crosse.

Thorolf Egil Gundersen was born in La Crosse on January 12, 1911, to Adolf and Helga (Isakasetre) Gundersen.³ His father left Norway and came to La Crosse in 1891. Although the elder Gundersen did not intend to stay in La Crosse any longer than it took to pay his medical school bills and gain some experience, his partnership with Christian Christensen, Greggar Smedal, and later Edward Carlsson, in the second floor of the Markos Building on Third and Pearl streets was the beginning of what is now Gundersen Clinic.⁴

Thorolf was the youngest of Adolf and Helga Gundersen's six sons. All of them went on to become doctors.⁵

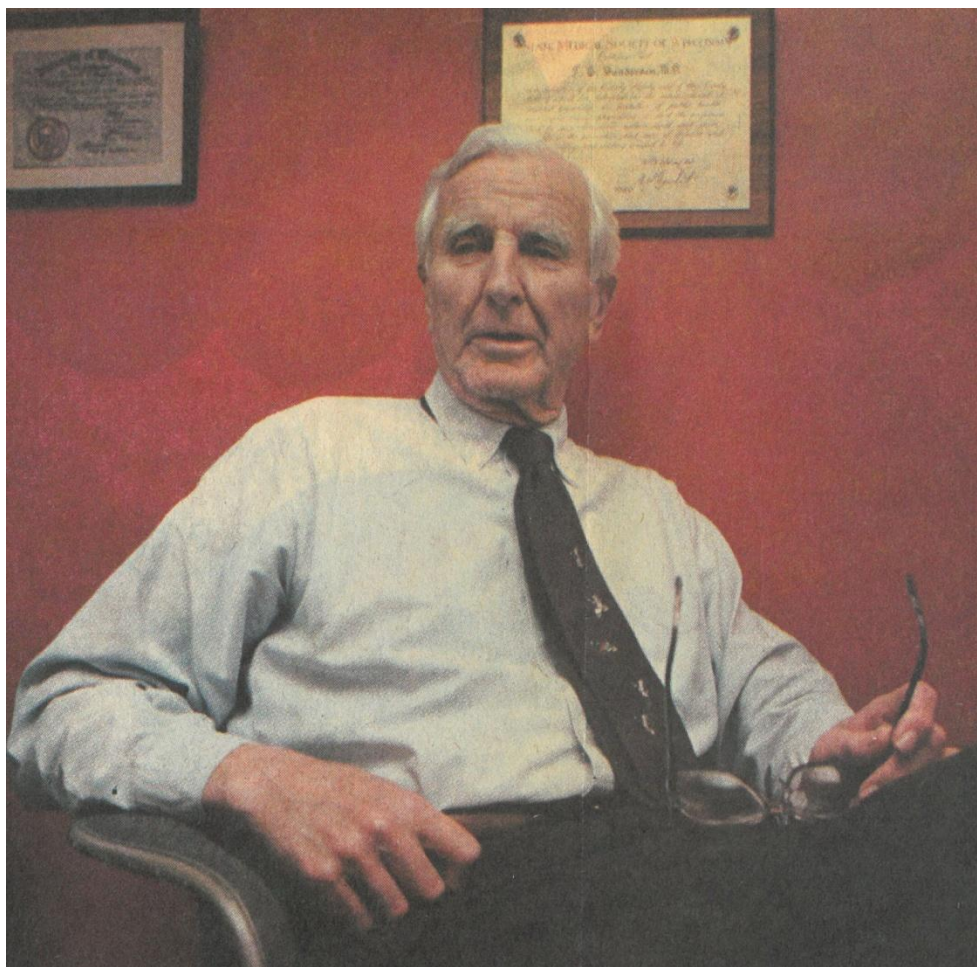
Thorolf Gundersen graduated from Central High School in 1928. Following three years at the University of Wisconsin, he went to Harvard Medical School and graduated from there in 1935. Gundersen then trained at Columbia Presbyterian Hospital in New York, the University of Wisconsin General Hospital,

and Massachusetts General Hospital. In 1939, he joined his older brothers, Sigurd, Gunnar, and Alf as a junior partner in the Gundersen Clinic.⁶

While he was in New York, Gundersen met Ruth Englesen, a Norwegian woman who was stranded in the United States after the German invasion of Norway. They were married on August 10, 1940, in Hingham, Massachusetts.⁷

Of course, the need for doctors was great during World War II. Dr. Thorolf Gundersen joined the United States Army in December 1942.⁸ He served as a battalion surgeon.⁹ Major Thorolf Gundersen was in five campaigns in the European Theater of Operations for 21 months. First, he was with the [99th infantry battalion](#), composed of Norwegian Americans, and then with the Fourth Convalescent Hospital of the First Army in France and Germany. He was discharged from the army on October 6, 1945.¹⁰

After his discharge, Gundersen resumed his medical practice at the Gundersen Clinic. He was the first doctor in Wisconsin to be certified for internal medicine.¹¹ Gundersen was also the medical director of the Oak Forest Sanatorium from 1947-1972.¹² In 1964, he was one of the forces behind the transformation of Gundersen Clinic from a family partnership to a corporation.¹³



Dr. Thorolf Gundersen

(*La Crosse Tribune*, 1985 February 2, page 9)

Dr. Gundersen retired from medicine on January 1, 1985, at the age of 74. At that time, he said his most important accomplishment was helping to organize the department of internal medicine. This was a doctor who practiced what he preached when it came to staying active and fit. He played tennis three or four times a week, fished, hunted, and was an avid cross-country skier. Gundersen also kept himself busy with hobbies related to his Norwegian heritage. He carved chairs out of hollowed-out tree trunks. It took a year to finish one "kubbe stool," and he was working on his seventh one when he retired. Another hobby was using needle and thread to create Norwegian floor rugs called "riah rugs."¹⁴

When he was 87 years old, Gundersen had to move into Bethany-Riverside Nursing Home on Friday, February 20, 1998, because of an illness. Dr. Gundersen died on Monday, February 23, 1998, from pneumonia. His family and colleagues remembered him as a "superb doctor" who loved medicine and loved life. Dr. Edward Winga, who worked with Gundersen in internal medicine, said, "He was the epitome of what a doctor should look like and act like."¹⁵

Dr. Gundersen was survived by his wife and three children. His family requested donations in his name to the Adolf Gundersen Medical Foundation of La Crosse or the Norskedalen Nature and Heritage Center at Coon Valley.¹⁶

In a break from family tradition, none of his three children went into medicine.¹⁷

Dr. Thorolf Gundersen should be remembered for a long life devoted to healing and living well. A person can still buy restored 1946 Ford Super DeLuxe Tudor Sedans, but, like Dr. Gundersen, they do not make them quite like that anymore.

Jeff Rand
Adult Services Librarian
La Crosse Public Library
jrand@lacrosselibrary.org

Sources & Notes:

¹ Ronald H. Bailey, *The Home Front: U.S.A.* (Alexandria, Virginia: Time-Life Books, 1977), 79-82.

² "July 3, 1945 - Ford starts postwar production," *Automotive History*, 2016 July 3, <https://automotivehistory.org/automotive/july-3-1945-ford-starts-postwar-production/>.

³ "Thorolf Egil Gundersen," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1998 February 24, page B-2.

⁴ Carol Kaufmann, "Medical pioneers: St. Francis Foundation to honor Skemps, Gundersens," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1986 February 16, page 9.

⁵ Terry Rindfleisch, "Thorolf Gundersen dead at 87," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1998 February 24, page A-1.

⁶ Kris Kodrich, "Award for father presented in Norway," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1985 February 2, page 9.

⁷ *La Crosse Tribune*, 1998 February 24, page B-2.

⁸ *La Crosse Tribune*, 1998 February 24, page B-2.

⁹ *La Crosse Tribune*, 1985 February 2.

¹⁰ "First Postwar Car Purchased," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1945 November 11, page 2.

¹¹ *La Crosse Tribune*, 1998 February 24, page B-2.

¹² *La Crosse Tribune*, 1998 February 24, page A-6.

¹³ *La Crosse Tribune*, 1998 February 24, page A-1.

¹⁴ *La Crosse Tribune*, 1985 February 2.

¹⁵ *La Crosse Tribune*, 1998 February 24, page A-1.

¹⁶ *La Crosse Tribune*, 1998 February 24. page B-2.

¹⁷ *La Crosse Tribune*, 1998 February 24, page A-6.