

PRESS RELEASE

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"The post-war generation is unique"

The BERNER Group honoured its founder Albert Berner with a festive ceremony. The entrepreneur from Künzelsau in southern Germany celebrated his 90th birthday last Saturday. In addition to close friends and companions, invited guests from politics, business and society paid tribute to his impressive life's work. Accompanied by his wife Ursula, the jubilant watched the event at the company's headquarters, visibly moved.

The motto of the ceremony was: 90 years of courage. "Because you, dear Dad, have shown courage time and time again," explained Christian Berner, who is leading the family business as CEO since 2012, now in its second generation. "And we want to learn from you how to be courageous." The celebration was therefore about more than just his father's birthday: "We are also celebrating the legacy of his entrepreneurship, his values and his contribution to this country and to Europe."

A gallery walk took guests through the most important stages of Albert Berner's career, who – according to Dr. Walter Döring, Baden-Württemberg's former Minister of Economic Affairs and Deputy Prime Minister, in his laudatory speech – was a "pioneer and co-founder of the German economic miracle" and took a few detours "before finding his calling and refusing to let anything or anyone stand in the way of achieving his goals". "I didn't have a plan," the jubilant revealed in an emotional film with his characteristic honesty. "It just happened." He started his own business practically overnight with just 3,000 D-Mark in start-up capital. On 1 April 1957, he visited his first customer with an old Borgward and a trunk full of screws.

Hunger for success, discipline and creative energy

Just as courageous as when he founded the company, he later acted as an entrepreneur. He often took on debt to finance necessary investments. He often invested a fundamental share of his company to open-up new business areas or new markets abroad, which he ventured into without any knowledge of foreign languages. "I think there were many moments of fear and despair in your life," Christian Berner summed up. For the passionate boxer Albert Berner, attack was always considered the best form of defense, both in his personal and professional life, even if it was risky. "And you only had risks, no security," emphasized Christian Berner, referring to the post-war generation. "You were aware that everything has its price. You understood that risk and reward are linearly related long before banking professors came up with this equation. This stands in heavy contrast to today's society, which wants to shower but doesn't want to get wet."

As a child, Albert Berner experienced the consequences of the World War first-hand – death, destruction, loss of possessions. "This terrible experience had a profound impact on you and your generation and drove you forward," said Christian Berner. Hungry for a better life, he worked his way up from modest circumstances with discipline, dedication, willpower and creative power. "We all tip our hats to you, and I personally take you as my role model," says Christian Berner. The starting conditions for Albert Berner were as bad as they could have been. But he was determined to give his very best every day and never rest on his laurels. "Your generation understood that prosperity can only exist through hard work," said Christian Berner. "Work was not a burden for you. You knew that you would only get more if you worked harder and achieved more than others. You didn't wait for help from outside, you got things done." Even the most severe crises – whether economic or health-related – could not stop Albert Berner. He adapted the company to constantly changing realities and made it strong enough to compete successfully. Despite all the progress, he always remained down-to-earth and never forgot his roots. "Your generation didn't just work for yourselves," said Christian Berner. "You wanted to rebuild your country. You paid into pension and social security funds so that no one would have to grow old in poverty. You re-armed our country so that we could live in peace and freedom. You built roads and paths out of the rubble so that we could trade. And you single-handedly created a Europe that holds together."

Social and community commitment

For Albert Berner, business growth and social responsibility were and remain inseparably linked. With his social commitment he has done a lot of good for many people, both through the Albert Berner Foundation in the Hohenlohe region and at other locations within the BERNER Group. The high esteem in which the 90-year-old is held within the company was evident in a video clip featuring congratulations from the European subsidiaries. "Your career motivates us to push the limits of what is possible in order to contribute to a better future, just as you have done," said Peter Schmidt, CEO of Berner Omnichannel Trading Holding, who congratulated Albert Berner on behalf of the 8,000 employees. "We are proud to be part of a family business that continues to follow your professional ideals and personal values to this day."

At the end of the official celebrations, Christian Berner called on the guests to learn from the post-war generation: "This generation is unique. We must listen to them. They defined what Germany was and, hopefully, what it will be again. We must move away from the values of the dreamy and affluent society and return to this founding spirit. Let us revive this founding spirit and courage!"