



Honoring The Breaks They Were Given

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One grew up in the small town of Koppel, Pennsylvania, in a family of working-class Italian-American immigrants employed by the Pittsburgh & Lake Erie Railroad. The other was a member of one of the best-known families in Allegheny County, whose father and grandfather were successful businessmen who quietly transformed the region through their philanthropy.

Bob Pietrandrea and Henry Posner III are two opposites, who together built a company that

has spanned four continents, and whose 30-year friendship is now immortalized in an endowed professorship in Carnegie Mellon University's Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering.

Pietrandrea speaks of how his upbringing and life experiences helped him achieve success. Growing up in a community of 1,000 people and raised by parents who survived both the Great Depression and World War II, he learned early lessons about the importance of hard work,

family and giving to those in need. The strong work ethic allowed him to rise in the ranks of two railroad firms, P&LE and L. B. Foster Company, but he also credits a bit of luck along the way.

“A lot of people work hard; they just didn’t get the breaks that I got,” he said. “I would never have enjoyed the level of success I’ve had if not for my encounter with Henry [Posner III] and his family 30 years ago.”

Posner, a Princeton and Wharton graduate who had spent 10 years at Conrail, returned to his childhood home of Pittsburgh in 1987 with the vision of building a railroad management business focused on acquiring domestic lines during a time when companies were selling off or abandoning large swaths of track. That year, Posner and Pietrandrea founded Railroad Development Corporation (RDC). Pietrandrea, who had been involved in similar railway transactions at L. B. Foster, initially served as vice president — a role that grew into executive vice president, then president.

The company has thrived because of their contrasts.

“Bob is much different than me,” Posner said, “which is why the partnership has not only survived but prospered. He is all business, and comes at it from a different perspective.”

Posner, the chairman of RDC, often describes the two in locomotive terms: He is the throttle, Pietrandrea is the brake.

“We are, at this point, not necessarily telepathically connected,” he said, “but can operate with a certain amount of knowing how the other will think without it becoming a constraint.”

RDC has taken them around the globe — sometimes, Posner says, “to hell and back.”

Both partners speak of low points — when an early deal to buy P&LE fell through in a very public fashion and was splashed across local media, or when RDC’s substantial investment to revive a Guatemalan railroad ended in a lengthy legal case against the country’s government. They also speak of their successes that started in Iowa and spread to Peru, Argentina, Africa and Europe.

Over three decades, the working relationship has grown to become a friendship outside the office that includes Pietrandrea’s wife, Chris, and Posner’s wife, Anne Molloy, a Carnegie Mellon trustee. From special family occasions and Steelers season tickets at Heinz Field to Pietrandrea’s legendary Beatles-themed party called “Bobstock,” the four share a mutual admiration for each other.

Throughout this time, the Pietrandreas say they were proud to be connected to a family whose philanthropy has been inspirational.

“When Bob took the job with RDC, it was a big step into the unknown that opened up our world,” said Chris, who pursued a chemical engineering degree at CMU for a year before marrying Bob. “We didn’t know Henry and Anne, but over time you learn these are people who have so much overwhelming integrity and quiet generosity, you can’t help but be thankful to have met and learned from them.”

At Carnegie Mellon, the Posners supported the construction of the Posner Center, where the family’s collection of rare books and artifacts are displayed. In February 2016, Henry and Anne gave a significant contribution to endow Presidential Scholarships.

“THE THING THAT TOUCHES MY HEART IS THE
GENEROSITY OF THE POSNER FAMILY, WHICH SETS
AN EXAMPLE FOR ME, AS WELL.” BOB PIETRANDREA

Chris added, “We grew up in a small town; we’re simple, average people. Our philosophy is, if you have what you need, then you have enough.”

In 2016, the Pietrandreas contributed \$4 million for expansions at McGuire Memorial, a Pittsburgh-area nonprofit that provides services for children and adults with developmental disabilities. And this winter, they wanted to honor their many years of friendship with the Posners. Over lunch with Jim Rohr, chairman of Carnegie Mellon’s Board of Trustees, Bob decided to make a gift to endow a chair in the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering for a junior faculty member. The couple chose civil engineering because multiple generations of the Posner family — including Henry and daughter Ida — have worked in the field, and Carnegie Mellon because, Bob said, “It’s one of the great engineering schools in the country.”

It was Rohr, the Pietrandreas say, who persuaded them to tie both couples’ legacies together in perpetuity in the name of the professorship. Thus, he and Chris endowed the Henry Posner, Anne Molloy, and Robert and Christine Pietrandrea Career Development Chair in Civil

Engineering to provide support for a faculty member in the early phases of the path to tenure.

“Given our close friendship with and admiration for them, it’s an honor for us to have our names in association with them,” Molloy said. “Because we believe in investing in people, we’re particularly delighted that they are supporting a junior faculty member in civil engineering.”

“Faculty development chairs are such a critical way to help build the careers of talented researchers and educators,” said David Dzombak, the Hamerschlag University Professor and head of the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering. “That this gift gives us the ability to nurture a future leader in the field is something special indeed.”

For Bob Pietrandrea, the gift is one way to pay back the breaks he received many years ago.

“I hope this chair gives someone else an opportunity to advance through the ranks, just as those who helped me when I was young,” Pietrandrea said. “Who knows what this person will become?”

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Photo caption: (l-r) Henry Posner III, Anne Molloy and Bob and Chris Pietrandrea have immortalized a 30-year friendship with an endowed professorship.

