

INSTRUMENTAL IN THE QUAD CITIES

There aren't many industrial facilities that greet someone with a warm welcome. Having that greeting come from the president of a multi-million dollar company is an even more impressive feat. Mike Steffenson, President of Parr Instrument Company (PIC), shakes hands with a kind, and cordial, smile. A case in the lobby, full of awards and products, informs guests that they are not in a run-of-the-mill machine shop.

"Forgive me for not wearing a tie," said Manley Hoppe, as he entered the company he has been a part of since 1936, "I couldn't remember how to tie it." Parr Instrument Company is where Manley, at age 96, serves as Chairman Emeritus. Ask him why he is still working after all of these years and Manley will tell you, "They wouldn't let me retire." After hearing about all of the things Manley has contributed to Parr Instrument Company and the community around him, it would be extremely hard to let him go.

November 28, 1910 welcomed Manley R. Hoppe into this world. Manley was born in Groton, South Dakota, to Julius and Josephine Hoppe. Spending time on his grandmother's ranch, in the hills of South Dakota, is a fond memory for Manley.

Helen and Douglas Steffenson added Michael to their family on May 18, 1938. With Mike's father was a Methodist Preacher, so the family would relocate about every three years. After graduating from college, Mike jokingly states, "The place I lived the longest was my fraternity house."

Both, Steffenson and Hoppe, share an abundant amount of similarities.

Both graduated from Iowa State University with Chemical Engineering degrees. Manley graduated in 1932. He went on to work as a graduate assistant and an instructor for ISU. Mike graduated in 1959. Mike and Manley are still active in alumni affairs at the university.

Each of the men have served time in the military. Manley served in the Army as the Officer in Charge of the Incendiary Bomb Plant at the Rocky Mountain Arsenal, in Denver, CO. Mike spent three years in the Navy as an Instructor, from 1959 to 1962. He retired from the U.S. Navy Reserve as Captain, after 27 years of service.

Family encompasses the two men, and they wouldn't have it any other way. Manley and his wife, Lois, had two daughters, Jean (Mike's wife) and Susan. The daughters have given Manley and Lois five grandchildren and four great-grandchildren. Mike and Jean have a son, Doug, and a daughter, Sandy.

And, you won't find very many pictures that include Mike or Manley. That is because each of them share an admiration for photography and spend their time behind the camera. Mike has taken a number of underwater photos that make up the "aquarium" inside Parr Instrument Company.

Our community, in the Quad Cities, has welcomed the likes of Manley and Mike. Each of the men have an extensive list of civic efforts. Manley mentions a lengthy list of community contributions, that includes serving as Commissioner for Moline Housing Authority, President of Moline Rotary Club, President of Augustana College Research Foundation, and Board Member of what used to be Moline Community Chest. Mike has served as President of Moline YMCA, President of Moline Rotary Club, and President of Associated Employers.

The “Boat Life” is something Mike and his wife, Jean, love to live. They relish their vacation time traveling to places they are able to explore the waters. Mike has acted as commodore for a local sailing club in Davenport. With many pictures of their scuba diving, Mike and Jean adore spending time on their boat in the state of Maine.

Receiving an honor from the United States Secretary of Commerce is an accomplishment any business would be proud to obtain. Parr Instrument Company has the honor of receiving two of those awards. In 1982, PIC was recognized for their excellence in their exports and expanding their business by 25% each year, for five years, and received a President's E Award. There are only about 40 business in the state of Illinois that have this distinguished award. Five years after receiving the E Award, in 1988, PIC earned the E Star Award, which is the second and final level of the E Award.

Another distinct honor has been bestowed upon Manley for his work at PIC. Manley was given the Scientific Apparatus Makers Association's Award. This award, given annually, is the highest award anyone can receive in that particular industry. In a way, you could say Manley has been the “Cy Young Award Winner” of the science apparatus makers trade.

The company also experiences very low employee turnover rates. Part of that reason might be the way the company treats their employees. Not only does PIC have a very nice facility, they have very nice people. PIC also shows they care about their employees. In 2003, The Principal Financial Group named Parr Instrument Company, one of the “10 Best Companies for Employee Financial Security” for their lucrative benefits package they offer their employees.

The future is a promising endeavor, according to Mike. Mike is excited about the advances of technology and what is to come. He recalls seeing pictures of people on ladders, looking in through second story windows of hospitals, trying to see their sick children. Mr. Steffenson believes today's advances in the medical and technological fields have been for the best and are getting better.

While Manley was at Iowa State University, he took in some advice he shares with others today. Professor Sweeney told Manley, “Always observe someone who has risen to the top in his profession, whether he is an engineer, athlete, or politician. He has something that has helped him to reach that level. And if you can gather some of it, you'll benefit from it.” Manley and Mike have certainly displayed, and carried on, this philosophy for others to take from their example.

The company and community efforts given by the two gentlemen have left a great impact on the Quad City area. And, if forgetting how to tie a tie means accomplishing the feats Manley Hoppe and Mike Steffenson have made, then all of us should be so lucky to attend more meetings without our ties.