

# History in the Making

*William Dietrich leaves his mark on Thiel College with \$25-million gift*

Despite his incredible business success and generous spirit, William S. Dietrich II was not a household name in northwestern Pennsylvania. However, in recent months, his generosity has put him and the institutions he valued in the spotlight. Those institutions include Thiel College, the place where his parents met and fell in love in the 1920s. Upon his passing on Oct. 6, the College became the latest recipient of his generosity with a \$25 million gift, the largest in Thiel College's 145-year history.

"A gift of this magnitude has the potential to fundamentally change Thiel College," said Dr. Troy VanAken, Thiel College president. "Bill's generosity to Thiel, as well as the community we call home, is overwhelming. Each time we met over the last several years, I left impressed with Bill's passion, focus and ability to understand investments in an increasingly global economy. The faith and trust he has put in Thiel College with this investment is humbling and will enhance our ability to serve our mission of academic excellence, ethical leadership, diversity and service to the world. With this gift, we begin a new phase in the history of Thiel College."

Bill Dietrich's precarious financial situation growing up with his parents in Pittsburgh and Conneaut Lake, Pa., left an indelible mark on him. He knew he wanted to be successful and never spend another moment's worry about money.

After graduating from Princeton University in 1960, Dietrich served in the U.S. Marine Corps Reserves before joining Dietrich Industries, Inc., the company founded by his father, and transforming it from a small steel warehouse and distribution business to the nation's largest manufacturer of light metal framing for the construction industry. He earned a master's and doctoral degrees in political science from the University of Pittsburgh while running the company. In 1996, Worthington Industries bought the company and asked Dietrich to remain as director, which he did until his retirement in 1999 when he turned his full attention to managing the Dietrich Charitable Trusts.

Dietrich's connection to Thiel began in the 1920s when his parents, Kenneth Dietrich and Marianna Brown, met as Thiel students. Ken was a business major and Marianna studied English as a humanities major. Dietrich cites his mother for instilling in him the desire to explore the world and diverse new ideas and apply the knowledge gained to scholarship, entrepreneurship, collaboration and community. His father, whom he described as "a good man," taught his son the business that he would later make more successful than his father could have dreamed.



*Bill Dietrich with Dr. Troy VanAken on Sept. 7 at the announcement of his gift to Carnegie Mellon University.*

Shortly after graduation, Ken '31 and Marianna '32 married in 1933 and they began a life together in Pittsburgh and had two children, William and Linda. The Dietrichs returned to northwestern Pennsylvania in 1947 to run a small hotel in Conneaut Lake, Pa. Soon after, Ken Dietrich started a small lumber business near Blairsville, Pa., which would grow to become Dietrich Industries Inc. and would later flourish under his son's direction. Ken and Marianna retired to Florida by the late 1960s while Bill grew Dietrich Industries to 19 plants throughout the country and weathered the 1970s recession by developing steel wall studs for the construction industry, something which by 1980 would account for \$15 million of the company's \$100 million annual sales. By 1996, the company would record \$350 million in annual sales.

Ken Dietrich stayed connected to Thiel, serving on the college's Board of Trustees from 1978 to 1984. Bill Dietrich was honored by Thiel College in 1996 for his leadership of Dietrich Industries with the Haller Enterprise Institute's Entrepreneur of the Year award, which is given annually by the college to a business owner who has demonstrated entrepreneurial leadership.

Unlike many, Dietrich didn't spend the remainder of his days flying around the globe on a private jet from vacation spot to vacation spot. Instead, he poured his incredible skill, determination and work effort into shepherding his funds and making them grow so that when he passed away, he would make the region that he invested his life in stronger.

“Bill spoke often and with great pride about how important this gift would be to Thiel College, an institution that meant so much to his family,” said Edward J. Grefenstette, the chief investment officer of the Dietrich Charitable Trusts. “He was highly confident that the combination of these resources and President VanAken’s leadership would mean that Thiel’s greatest days were in front of it.”

The gift will not be available as a lump sum to the College. Rather the structure of the gift is designed to allow it to grow through compounding returns for many, many years. Disbursements from the fund will be made each year to the College’s endowment, where it will continue to grow. The College will be able to draw 5 percent annually from the endowment contributions.

The source of the fund that will benefit Thiel is the Dietrich Charitable Trusts, which are charitable remainder trusts created by Dietrich that own assets primarily generated by the 1996 sale of Dietrich Industries, which were grown significantly through his investments. Upon his passing, the trusts will fund a new charitable organization, The Dietrich Foundation, which will administer the funds benefiting Thiel College.

The Dietrich Foundation will manage funds left by Dietrich to Carnegie Mellon University (\$265 million),



Ken '31 (top) and Marianna (Brown) '32  
Dietrich

The University of Pittsburgh (\$125 million), Thiel (\$25 million), The Pittsburgh Foundation (\$18.1 million, including \$5 and \$2.5 million for the cities of Greenville and Conneaut Lake respectively), Duquesne University (\$12.5 million), Chatham University (\$5 million), and the Pittsburgh Cultural Trust (\$5 million).

Along with his business success, Dietrich was also a lifelong scholar of history and political science who never stopped learning. He was the author of “In the Shadow of the Rising Sun: The Political Roots of an American Economic Decline” and “Eminent Pittsburghers: Profiles of the City’s Founding Industrialists,” a collection of his essays which was released this year, and was working on a third book about China at the time of his death. He also was a regular contributor to Pittsburgh Quarterly magazine.

Dietrich was well-known for his commitment to the betterment of the Pittsburgh region. He served on the boards of the University of Pittsburgh, Carnegie Mellon University, the Carnegie Museum of Art, the Allegheny Conference on Community Development, Chatham University, the Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre, the Pittsburgh Symphony Society, the Southwestern Pennsylvania Growth Alliance, the UPMC Health System and the Greater Pittsburgh Council of the Boy Scouts of America.

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