

The world recently lost Robert E. Mort, Sr.—beloved husband, father, grandfather, friend, colleague, and volunteer. A long-time contributor to and supporter of the building components industry, Mort passed away peacefully in the early morning hours of December 12, 2005 at his residence with his family at his side after a relatively short illness. Mort was 84.

Although he is no longer with us, Mort's legacy lives on in each soul he touched during his lifetime. According to the many people who had the great fortune of crossing his path, "Bob" wanted to be remembered most of all for touching lives. And touch he did.

"March to the sound of the drums you hear."

Born to Roy Fitzgerald and Minnie Gross Mort on a day of good luck, March 17, 1921, in Poland, OH, Bob adopted a mantra that would become one of his favorite quotes, "march to the beat of your own drum," early in his life. Like many in his generation, Bob proudly served in the United States Army during World War II, attended the U.S. Army Midwestern Signal School, and was instrumental in many overseas combat operations. Because of his leadership and service record, Bob was later appointed to a communications post for General MacArthur at the American Embassy in Tokyo. Bob was aboard the USS Missouri when Japan signed the Instrument of Surrender on September 2, 1945 in Tokyo Bay. For his service, Bob earned five Campaign Bronze Stars among other medals. "[My dad] was proud of his military career in a humble sort of way," remembers son Tom.

His service in the military was only the beginning of Bob's lifelong commitment to service and leadership. Bob married Donna R. Haessly in January 1947. Bob and Donna met after WWII, when Bob had just arrived back from the service. They began dating when Donna graduated from college and moved home. They loved to go dancing, and frequently went on picnics and spent time outdoors together.



Leave a

Remembering the Life of Robert E. Mort, Sr.

Legacy

by Libby Maurer &
Emmy Thorson-Hanson

Creating their homestead in Hermitage, PA in 1950, the Morts' family grew to include four children: son Thomas and the late Robert Jr., and daughters Patricia and Mary. Bob belonged to the First Presbyterian Church in Sharon.

Bob's career began in accounting, Donna recalls. He established an accounting firm, built an office building, staying in that business for numerous years while at the same time he and his brother, Edgar, formed a company called Inter-Lock Steel Co. around 1960. Together with sister companies Unity Machine Tool and Die Co. and Standard Aluminum Company of America, they supplied heavy industrial machinery and steel products to the truss industry. "I can remember them talking about producing [truss] plates even before they were in the business," says Donna. A salesman at heart with a genuine understanding of the human condition, Bob went out on the road to develop new business and generate sales while helping individuals just starting in the truss business. Thanks to his background in public accounting, he was able to help with the business end of start-up companies as well. Edgar ran the plant operations side of Inter-Lock, focusing his efforts on manufacturing and delivery. Edgar's two sons, David and Doug, were also active in the business. Bob's primary responsibilities were engineering, technology, sales and product development. Donna says when sons Robert Jr. and Tom got old enough they became involved in their father's business. Tom, currently regional vice president for MiTek Industries, Inc., remembers why his dad excelled in his career: "Bob was a natural communicator. He had the ability to reach people of all levels and backgrounds. He truly listened to what people were saying."

Consolidation among industry suppliers would eventually result in a change of ownership for Bob and Edgar's company. "Bob was a very astute businessman, a tough negotiator, and a person of great integrity," says Gene Toombs, CEO of Mi-Tek. After negotiating for a year, MiTek Industries acquired Inter-Lock in October 1991, and Bob stayed on through the transition in an advisory role. "We wound up with a seamless transition from Inter-Lock to MiTek due to his efforts," says Toombs.

MiTek President Tom Manenti saw Bob as father figure: "I thought extremely highly of him...he had a way of making guys feel like sons. He was a mentor in my business career."

In addition to his tremendous contribution to Inter-Lock and MiTek, Bob will be remembered for several inventions. He held a patent on Multi-Head Roof Truss Machine/Vac-u-Lok Multi-Head C-Clamp presses/Portable C-Clamp Splicing Machine. Edgar's patented T-Plates (for the top chord bearing floor truss) are still used by MiTek today. Bob and Edgar's early plate designs were forerunners to current models used by many plate companies.

A vocal advocate of the lifelong pursuit of continuing education, Bob stayed connected to academia as an adult. He heavily recruited young engineers to join the truss industry by working with Youngstown State University professor John (Jack) Ritter, P.E., to place students in truss industry positions. Throughout his career, Bob strived to promote the widespread acceptance of wood trusses in building applications by conducting load, sound transmission and fire tests. He was also instrumental in gaining acceptance from the Federal Housing Authority by submitting thousands of truss drawings, all supported by dozens of corroborating load tests done throughout the country. Craig Rustay of Greene Lumber Co. in Jamestown, NY, invited Bob to serve on a committee formed to create a document that interpreted building code provisions. The result was Bob's "Code of Standard Practice," a document that was not only accepted by the truss industry, but by code officials and numerous political subdivisions of this country, including the five boroughs of New York City.

"He liked to do things behind the scenes and he didn't like a lot of attention."

A relentless proponent of unity among industry leaders, Bob was actively involved in the Truss Plate Institute (TPI) while also advocating for an association exclusively representing the interests of truss manufacturers. He was a founding member of TPI, actively encouraging all truss plate manufacturers to produce to the highest quality standards. In 1977 and 1991, Bob served as TPI President. He understood the differences between suppliers and manufacturers, yet recognized the importance of working together. He recognized that plate suppliers and truss manufacturers should have two separate but connected organizations, and thus advocated for the creation of the Component Manufacturers Council (CMC), when it first began around 1962. After many meetings and much debate, the current Wood Truss Council of America evolved from the CMC in 1983.

Despite his extensive work schedule and the time and effort he devoted to his career, Bob always had more to give at home. Bob and Donna shared a special connection from the very start of their courtship that many people only dream of. Not only did they share the same birthday, but in Donna, Bob had found someone who was equally as kindhearted and generous as her husband. They both shared the same attitude about life: **Do the right thing.**

Bob once said, "I would like everybody to do the right thing. I don't like being honored for something that we should do." Throughout their marriage, Bob and Donna touched so many

Continued on page 66

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Leave a Legacy

Continued from page 65

lives that in 2002 they were both dubbed Buhl Day honorees, and were recognized for their commitment to education and the betterment of the disadvantaged in Shenango Valley, PA. At the time, Bob had referred to their contributions as "labors of love" commenting, "We've always been involved in the gut issues...for the [benefit of] people who have fallen through the cracks."

Another advocacy effort for Bob and Donna was fighting discrimination and prejudice by facilitating equality. "I care deeply about working to eliminate discrimination and I feel that everybody should have an equal chance," Donna once said. For his part, Bob was an active member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). He was a founding father of the Shenango Valley Urban League and served on its board for many years.

He was a wonderful father and grandfather, always setting a good example of how to live life to the fullest while staying true to your values. He was a creative storyteller and often took his grandchildren fishing, swimming, to parks and on vacations to the ocean, Donna says.

Bob lived every moment of his life according to his ideals and convictions. Always giving to his family and friends, deserving organizations, or people in need, Bob was a constant source of sincere effort and commitment to make the world a better place, through everything he did. "He was generous and caring on every level," recalls Donna. "He was able to cultivate and mentor people to perform at their best by working one on one with



In 2002 Bob and Donna were recognized for their commitment to education and the betterment of the disadvantaged in Shenango Valley, PA.

them, which contributed in making him a great leader," says son Tom. No matter what he was doing or where he was, Bob was making a difference. "He touched many lives along the way, often one-on-one. Everyone had a 'Bob Story,'" remembers Donna.

After his passing, Bob's positive impact on the lives of countless individuals became unmistakable. "He was quite a person, and we have realized that even more since his death. People have been calling to tell us special things about their relationship with Bob. That's when the magnitude of his influence really hit us, of how many people that he had been involved with and how many relationships he had," says Donna. Inevitably Bob left an indelible mark on everyone in his life, Bob never disappointed. "He was just a prince of a gentleman and he left a tremendous legacy. He lived up to everything, what you saw was what you got with Bob," says Manenti. "Throughout the years, Bob was a very compassionate man. He always offered a helping hand, be it in business or personal matters. Frankly, he was someone we all looked up to," notes Toombs.

Bob's devotion to his community was no different than his commitment to family and work. Bob volunteered for countless organizations over the course of his life, and true to form, he left his very inspiring mark on each of them. Keystone Blind Association—dedicated to improving the quality of life for blind people—was just one of the many organizations he served. Keystone's first quarter newsletter remembered Bob's selfless contribution: "Robert Mort, a great friend of the

Continued on page 68

"Giving of one's self is rewarded tenfold."



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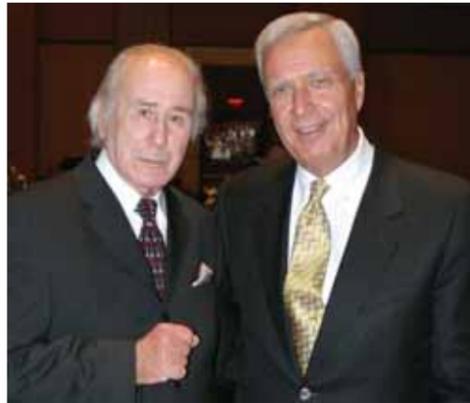
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Leave a Legacy

Continued from page 66

agency...was the major benefactor and driving force behind the origination and growth of the Keystone Kids Program. Up until the time of his illness, Mr. Mort attended most of the Keystone Kids' activities, sharing his time and talents with the staff and the children. Our sincere sympathy to his family, and our deepest gratitude for designating the Keystone Kids Program as recipient of memorial donations. His memory will live on for years to come at the agency." Donna noted the importance of Keystone in her husband's life: "Working with visually impaired children was very important to him. He planned bowling outings, organized games of beeper baseball, Easter egg hunts, encouraged music lessons and recitals, writing and artwork." she said.

Children were always a large area of focus of Bob's volunteer and philanthropic efforts. Early on, he was a board member for Sharon General Hospital and was a loyal supporter and promoter for Mercer County Crippled Children's Association. Mr. Mort was one of the



Bob and Gene Toombs pose for a shot at BCMC 2004 in Charlotte, NC.



Bob enjoyed sport fishing, which he pursued in locations around the world. Here he and son Tom enjoy one of many exciting fishing trips.

pioneers in the forma-

tion of the former Shenango Valley Osteopathic Hospital. It was in his office in Hermitage that the first funds for the establishment of the hospital were collected and disbursed.

Even with the active lifestyle Bob led, he still made time to do the things he loved. Flying was a great source of enjoyment for Bob, once a member of the American Owners and Pilots Association. He was also fond of sport fishing, which he pursued all over the globe. He also enjoyed golf, boating, travel, genealogy, and studying astronomy. But his first passion was reading. "He was an avid reader, heavy on history, poetry and classic literature," recalls Donna. "He was always quoting books. We have a bookcase in every room of the house."

Not only did Bob love to read, he was also a passionate writer. When Bob became ill, his first book, *Summer-1933*, which recounted his childhood experiences and described what it was like growing up in the 1930s, was in the midst of publication. His family hurried the process along and he was able to see his first book in print before he passed. He also wrote a book on his experiences serving in WWII, which the Mort family plans to publish in the near future. Bob also loved to tell his grandchildren stories; they've been compiled into a book that the family also has goals of publishing in the future.

Music from a diverse set of genres was represented at Mort's memorial tribute on December 17, 2005, from "Ave Maria" and Nat King Cole's "Unforgettable" to the uplifting "Bridge over Troubled Water." Robert Mort's services were at McGonigle Funeral Home Chapel in the presence of family and friends. While Bob is missed, his legacy lives on, as if he were still among us. Donna said one of his favorite quotes was "better to light one candle than to curse the darkness." Bob's candle shines on. **SBC**

A special thanks to Donna Mort and Tom Mort for sharing their memories of Bob. Thanks also to Gene Toombs, Tom Manenti and Mike Klein of MiTek for contributing to this piece. To view Robert Mort, Sr.'s complete obituary, visit [Support Docs](http://www.sbcmag.info) at www.sbcmag.info.

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