

Bill Wolf leaves big legacy in York

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Bill Wolf and his wife, Cornelia, have played an important role in the growth of the York County Community Foundation, said Jane Conover, the foundation's president and CEO.

In 1992, the couple led the effort to grow the foundation's endowment to \$5 million and transform what had been largely a volunteer-led organization into one run by paid, professional staff. "That was a turning a turning point for us," Conover said. She called Bill Wolf, "one of the founding fathers of York."

Bill Wolf died Friday at his home in Mount Wolf, and his funeral services will be private, according to his obituary. He was 95. He was the father of Gov. Tom Wolf. Locally, Bill Wolf left a big legacy.

"There's not much that we can think of in the city that has gone on — or in York County — that the governor's dad hasn't had an impact on," said York Mayor Kim Bracey.

Bill Wolf shared some personality traits with his son, the Democratic governor of Pennsylvania.

"People may not like his politics, but they'll always say Tom Wolf is a nice guy," said former York Mayor John Brenner. "That didn't come from the sky."

Dave Confer, who worked with both Bill and Tom Wolf at the Wolf Organization, said they had similar leadership styles. They could insist on accountability in a firm, but gentle way, Confer said.

"Bill Wolf also had a wry sense of humor and a serious interest in martinis, Confer said. Bill Wolf once wrote a paper for a group he belonged to about the perfect martini. One of the keys: Go easy on the vermouth. The article was concise, well-written and funny, Confer said. "Everything he did, he wanted to do exceptionally well," Confer said. "And I think he accomplished that. But he also had a terrific sense of humor."

Community

Bracey knew Bill Wolf through community programs at Crispus Attucks, where she started working in the 1990s. "To see his passion and love of the community ... it was moving," Bracey said.

Bill Wolf was instrumental in the York County Community Foundation hiring its first executive director, Carolyn Steinhauser, and in encouraging other families to start charitable funds at the foundation, Conover said.

Today, the foundation's endowment is \$128 million.

To honor Wolf, the foundation named its building on West Market Street in downtown York "The William T. Wolf Center for Philanthropy" several years ago. A 2013 column by Gordon Freireich, a former York Sunday News editor, described Bill Wolf and brother-in-law John Zimmerman as "two men who helped shape the York County in which we live."

Bill Wolf was one of the founders of what would become the United Way of York County. His obituary describes a variety of leadership positions for him, including a founder, president and later chairman of the York Federal Savings and Loan Association.

He was also “a devoted husband and father, business executive, civic leader, generous philanthropist, and a life-long fan of the Mt. Wolf Wolves baseball team,” according to his obituary.

Business

The Wolf Organization dates back to 1843, when a Wolf opened a store along the banks of the Susquehanna River to sell dry goods and lumber. It’s now a York-based kitchen cabinet and building products business.

Bill Wolf started working for the business full-time in the 1940s, after returning from service in the U.S. Army during World War II. He became an owner in 1951 and was president from 1956 to 1975. One of his sons, Tom Wolf, bought the company with partners in 1986.

Tom Wolf, who was elected governor in 2014, is no longer an owner of the company.

In 2015, the Wolf Organization announced that a Virginia-based private equity firm had become a majority owner in the business, with the Wolf Organization management team owning the rest.

Tom Wolf has said the sale was part of a long-term succession plan, because the company has always operated under the idea that you should not have “absentee ownership.”

Dave Confer, general counsel for the Wolf Organization, said he ran into Bill Wolf and his wife, Cornelia, at a York restaurant a few months ago. Confer said Bill Wolf was pleased with the direction of the company. “He thanked us for doing such a good job, and I thanked him for giving us so much to work with,” Confer said.

Sources: *Newspaper archives, governor’s office, Wolf Organization website, obituary, original reporting*

