

P O L K B R O S F O U N D A T I O N
a foundation for chicago families

On Wednesday, March 22, the Polk Bros. Foundation lost a dear friend and Board member, Bruce Bachmann, who passed away at the age of 82 in his home in Highland Park. Bruce was a founding Board member of the Foundation, and brought his deep insights and warm advocacy to every facet of our work and our role in Chicago.

It is next to impossible to capture in such a short space all that Bruce did in his life or all the wonderful ways that he contributed to our community. But we'd like you to know a bit more about the man who meant so much to us and who had such an impact on who we are.

After early days growing through the ranks of his family business, the Polk Bros chain of appliance and retail stores, Bruce began a long and storied real estate career, where he specialized in real estate financing and investment. First at Heitman Mortgage Company and Philipsborn Equities, Bruce later established the highly successful Bachmann Associates in 1969. Independently and through partnerships (such as GBK Equity Lenders with Stewart L. Grill and Stuart M. Kaplan and with Romanek Properties and Right Residential), Bachmann Associates raised hundreds of millions of dollars in financing for Chicago-area developers and for buildings in college towns and state capitals.

Bruce married his college sweetheart Ann Cohen Bachmann, a union that lasted for 56 happy years until her passing in 2013. Together, they had four children – Steve Bachmann, Cathy (Doug) Ethridge, Betsy (Jeff) Kushen, and Andy Bachmann – and four grandchildren, Rachel Ethridge, Alex Kushen, Benjamin Ethridge, and Samatha Kushen.

Bruce was as active in his civic life as he was accomplished in his professional one. Champions for Chicagoans, he and his beloved wife Ann often directed their personal philanthropy to the cultural and Jewish organizations whose work they loved so dearly. Many of us fondly remember the enthusiasm Bruce had when he spoke of the latest show he'd seen at his favorite Chicago theater companies or of his passion for jazz and the American songbook. His work to help establish the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, to support the Illinois Holocaust Museum and Education Center, and to build the Israel Tennis Centers were three efforts of which he was especially proud.

And not only did he sit actively on our Board, but he extended his philanthropic and civic commitment through board service with Navy Pier, Inc., Roosevelt University, the Auditorium Theatre of Roosevelt University; as a life trustee with Jewish Community Centers of Chicago and Jewish Council for Youth Services; and, previously, with Chicago Jazz Ensemble at Columbia College, among others.

Beginning in the early 1990s, Bruce – along with Ann and his sister and brother-in-law, Roberta and Irv Lewis – sponsored a class of 57 students from a CPS elementary school through the I Have a Dream program. He and his family mentored these students, meeting with each one individually and regularly to talk about homework, grades and their lives. The work with these

students, which stretched from their late elementary school years through their time in college and beyond, became an important part of life for the Bachmanns, and they included their children in the tutoring and activities of the “Dreamers.” When Ann passed away in 2013, many of the students, now adults, attended her memorial service.

Bruce and Ann were also avid collectors of studio glass, and their beautiful pieces have been exhibited around the country and featured in many publications. Their extensive collection of nearly 300 glass pieces will be inducted into a special gallery at the Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn, Michigan at the end of April.

What we will remember best, though, is Bruce himself. He was incredibly thoughtful, respectful and considerate – an amazing man and a consummate gentleman. Bruce had an uncanny and very sincere ability to give you his complete attention. In every conversation, in every interaction, he listened closely and made everyone feel like they were the most special person. He certainly was, and we miss him.

We are grateful to have known Bruce and to have benefitted from his commitment, integrity and compassion. Even though he was with us at the Foundation for nearly 30 years, it was not nearly long enough.

Funeral service: Monday, March 27 at 10:00am at Weinstein & Piser Funeral Home, 111 Skokie Blvd., Wilmette. Internment Shalom Memorial Park. In lieu of flowers, the family asks that contributions may be made to the Israel Tennis Center Foundation (3275 W. Hillsboro Blvd., Deerfield Beach FL 33442, 954-480-6333) or Ravinia Festival's Education Fund (raviniawb.org/tribute-fund/tribute-gifts/ or 847-266-5045).