

PEOPLE OF ACTION

Douglas MacNeil

(Member since 1972)

“If I have seen further,” Isaac Newton wrote in a 1675 letter to a fellow scientist, “it is by standing on the shoulders of giants.”

Doug MacNeil has often referred to that quote when giving credit to those whose hard work helped pave the way for his own successes. And rather than bask in the glory of his achievements, Doug is the type of man who has always humbly and quietly paid it forward.

To honor their father’s altruistic spirit, MacNeil’s children have established the Doug MacNeil Legacy Scholarship.



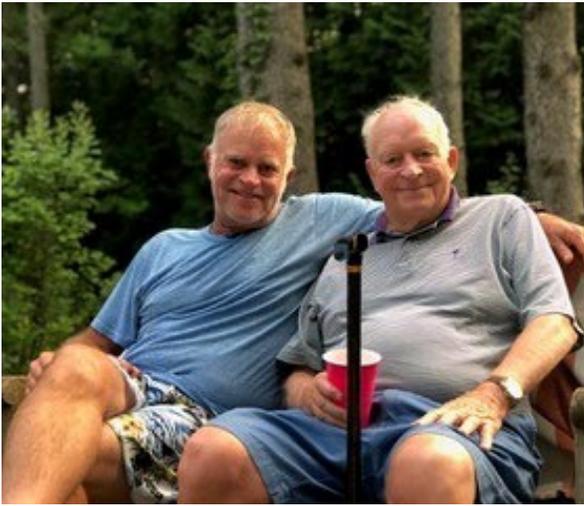
“My dad has always been invested in philanthropy and giving back to the community,” said Michael MacNeil, a fourth-generation Rotarian. “With all his time and investment in Rotary, it’s a natural fit to establish a scholarship in his name.”



A member for 49 years, Doug joined Rotary in 1972 and served as president in 1991-92. He belongs to a family of Rotary members: his grandfather Ray Smith (owner of the Pfister Hotel), father Cog MacNeil, his brother Sandy, and his uncle Larry Smith (1956-57 president), with his son Michael, who joined in 2018, carrying on the legacy.

Rotary is, according to Doug, a perfect conduit for “giving back; not just taking.” That’s a lesson he and his late wife, Janey, taught their children, Cog, Tracy, Michael and Amy.

“From the time we were young, our parents instilled the importance of giving back,” Michael said. For example, he and his siblings could spend a portion of their summer job earnings on something fun, but had to tuck a moderate portion away in savings and give the remainder to a good cause.



Their parents always matched the charitable amount. Consequently, the MacNeil children learned the value of donating not just money, but time and talent to community organizations and causes.

Born and raised in Milwaukee, Doug attended Milwaukee Country Day School, the University of Wisconsin–Madison where he met Janey, then served two years in the military before returning to Milwaukee to join Northwestern Mutual, and embarking on a long, successful insurance career. He and Janey, who passed away in 2017, raised their family in River Hills, and eventually saw it grow to include 12 grandchildren.

Throughout their 52 years together, Doug and Janey touched the lives of many, keeping family at the center and creating a home where all the kids and their friends were welcome to gather. The MacNeil children were expected to pursue a sport to stay active, attend church every Sunday, and sit down to dinner as a family every night no matter what. This was their time to talk about their day before their dad often left to go back to work.

Alongside building an idyllic life for his family, Doug was dedicated to making the Milwaukee community a better place for everyone.

“Doug cares deeply about Milwaukee and has always been keenly interested in what was going on here. If there was something that he could learn to help the community, he’d be all in,” said fellow Rotarian and past president Joe Caruso.

“He has a wonderful inquisitiveness and is a great listener who asks just the right questions to draw things out. And yes, he had opinions, but he keeps them to himself in order to gather all the information he needs to better understand the situation. I’ve always admired that,” Joe said.

Through the years, Doug has been involved with numerous professional, educational and arts organizations, including the Boys & Girls Club, the Wisconsin Policy Forum (past president), the Milwaukee Ballet, Peninsula Players, St. Ann Center, Basilica of St. Josaphat, University School of Milwaukee and Rotary.

“Since the day I met Doug, he has been a reliable and much-valued friend of St. Ann Center,” said fellow Rotarian Sister Edna Lonergan, President & CEO, St. Ann Center for Intergenerational Care.



“In addition to his own support, he also quietly influenced many others in the community to volunteer and support us without ever taking the credit. In his own quiet way Doug is a champion for the causes he believes in. And we are better off because of it,” Edna said.

When he’s not quietly helping out behind the scenes, Doug is a well-known serial networker, which was undoubtedly key to his professional success.

“My dad has a natural flair for introducing and connecting people,” Michael said. “He also has a gift for understanding people’s problems, which 99 percent of the time didn’t even relate to insurance. Yes, he sold insurance to mitigate people’s risks, but he was really a conduit for introductions that helped solved both personal and professional needs.”

And creating connections was exactly what drew Doug to Rotary.

“Rotary is a connection goldmine,” Michael said. “It’s all about networking and getting to know people. My dad loves meeting people and learning who they are. But for him, Rotary is all about giving back. It’s been such a big part of his life, and while there are a lot of avenues for gifting money, this [scholarship] is near and dear to his heart.”

To a person, Doug’s fellow Rotarians describe him as a warm, friendly man, who is genuinely interested in people.

“Doug is a true gentleman with a smile on his face and a twinkle in his eyes almost all the time, said past president Kathie Eilers. “He is generous and caring to many in the community— especially Rotary. As a past president, he is a great guest at our annual dinner, and always has a joke to share. I am honored to call him a friend.”

The MacNeils describe their father as a devoted husband and family man, a fabulous dad, a humble soul, a man of faith, a loyal friend, an avid outdoorsman, traveler and photographer, and an exceptional listener with a good sense of humor.

These days, Doug, 82, has slowed down a bit and the pandemic has made activities like attending Rotary difficult, but his passion for making a difference in his community will continue to shine through the Doug MacNeil scholarship.



Editor’s Note: Rotary People of Action is a bi-monthly series written by a group of Rotarians. This feature was written by Mary Bolich