

TRIBUTE

Ernest Del Monte: 'Cut from a Different Cloth'

My first encounter with Ernie Del Monte, University life trustee, was over lunch at the Pittsford Del Monte Lodge in May 2002. Ernie's grandson, Lee Halligan, a premed student at Reed College, was curious about neuroscience and neurosurgery and had asked his grandfather to introduce him to a neurosurgeon at the U of R. I offered to have Lee observe an awake brain operation and Ernie graciously thanked me. Then he ordered a cup of coffee and started asking me questions. What does the brain look and feel like at surgery? What can be done to improve the care of patients in Rochester and what barriers need to be overcome? What is the status of research at the U of R that might lead to a cure for brain diseases such as Alzheimer's disease and stroke?

By the end of this first of many four-hour lunches with Ernie, I realized that I had encountered a man who was cut from a different cloth than most of us.

Ernie died in April at age 87. He had assembled an extraordinary legacy of success in business: first in assembling missile generators, later in real estate, and finally by assembling hotels around the world using a patented construction method that was the product of his creative mind. And now



LEGACY: Del Monte hoped that "Alzheimer's and stroke will go the way of polio."

he was becoming interested in understanding how clinical care and scientific research could help patients with neurologic disease.

In the decade following my first lunch with Ernie, he immersed himself in a personal journey of discovery in neuromedicine. He came to the operating room to observe brain surgery. He toured our neuromedicine research laboratories. Over another four-hour lunch in Palm Springs in 2007, Ernie told me that he was inspired by the depth and breadth of talent in neuromedicine at Rochester and that he wanted to contribute. He said

to me: "U of R neuromedicine is bigger than you think; and I want it to get even bigger."

From that moment on, Ernie nurtured his passionate dream of bringing together talented physicians and scientists so that "some day, Alzheimer's and stroke will go the way of polio through the discovery of new treatments." In 2009, he provided significant support to establish the Medical Center's Ernest J. Del Monte Neuromedicine Institute.

Sharing a personal friendship with Ernie, his beautiful wife, Thelma, and his wonderful family over these past 10 years has been a priceless gift that I will always treasure. Never one to abandon center stage, Ernie told me several times: "Webster, you have taught me a lot about neuromedicine but I still don't think that I could do brain surgery; of course, I'm not sure that you could build a hotel either."

Ernie will be missed. But his legacy of generosity to the Rochester community and his contributions to U of R neuromedicine will live on.

—Webster Pilcher '83M (MD/PhD)

Pilcher is the Ernest and Thelma Del Monte Distinguished Professor in Neuromedicine.

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